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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors in middle schools that contributed to student outcomes. It was conducted in a district serving predominantly minority and disadvantaged students. Data collection involved surveys of 555 personnel in the district's 17 middle schools and interviews with teachers, administrators, instructional guides, students, and district office personnel. The study examined the influence of outside factors; how schools were organized to facilitate teacher collaboration; academic assistance available to students; how the schools were organized to deliver instruction; administrative structures and practices; and parent/community involvement and support. Overall, the schools were complex organizations that were difficult to define and categorize. Five schools were high academic performers, and five were low performers. There were no consistent relationships between their academic performance and the way they were judged by respondents. In three high performing schools, there was a culture of success that was not present in low performing schools. Schools appeared to focus their efforts on improving TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) scores, though many teachers believed this limited their ability to present material that would engage the students and develop their critical thinking skills. Teachers in every school rated themselves as the school's greatest strength, though they did not accept responsibility for certain school problems (e.g., poor discipline and apathy). Many teachers perceived that school administrators provided poor leadership and districts inadequately served school needs. The interview questions are appended. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS:

Lessons from an Urban Community

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

2000

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Teaching and Learning in the Middle Schools: Lessons from an Urban Community

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September 2000

Executive Summary

Focus of the Study

The principal focus of this study was the investigation of factors in middle schools that contribute to student outcomes. The study was conducted in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). This district serves approximately 59,000 students, 85% being minority and 89% economically disadvantaged. The purpose of the study was to provide information for the consideration of middle school educators, and especially for SAISD officials, so they might be guided in the delivery of support and assistance to the middle schools to enhance student performance. In SAISD the middle schools include grades 6-8.

The study was intended to investigate the factors shown below, but it was not limited to these factors:

- Influence of factors outside the individual schools, e.g. district policies and support, funding and policies from state and federal levels
- The way the school is organized to provide opportunities and encouragement for teacher collaboration
- Academic assistance available for students beyond regular classroom instruction
- The way the school is organized for the delivery of instruction
- Administrative structures and practices in the schools
- Parent/community involvement and support

Study Procedures

In this study two techniques were used to collect data: personal, face-to-face interviews, and a 33-item survey instrument. Personnel in all 17 of the middle schools were asked to complete the survey. A total of 920 surveys were distributed and 555 (60.33%) were returned. Six of the schools were selected as sample schools where interview data were collected. These schools were selected by district office personnel as being generally representative of all SAISD middle schools in terms of level of student performance on the state-mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In these schools teachers, administrators, instructional guides, and students were interviewed. District office personnel who work closely with middle schools were also interviewed.

Findings and Conclusions

Based on the outcomes from this study it must be concluded that middle schools, or at least those in SAISD, are complex organizations that are difficult to define and categorize. The findings from the study provide detailed and useful information about the individual schools, but efforts to classify or group them in relation to academic performance were elusive. Based on TAAS scores for the past three years, five schools were identified as high performing academically and five as low performing. There were no consistent relationships between the academic performance of these two groups of schools and the way they were judged by the respondents in their responses to the survey.

In the six schools where interviews were conducted, the additional information gained was helpful in explaining the factors in the individual schools that contributed to their level of academic performance. However, even this additional information did not lead to a determination of consistent factors across the schools. In the three high performing schools where interviews were conducted there was what might be called a culture of success. Each school had a history of high student achievement and this history seemed to drive the efforts of the staff to continue the pattern of success. The way this culture was developed and maintained was different in each school. This culture of success was not present in the two low performing schools where interviews were conducted. The sixth school was neither a high performing school nor a low performer. This school seemed to be developing a success culture, but it had not yet happened.

Although this study did not identify any factors that clearly and consistently related to the academic performance of the schools, it did develop findings that can be useful in designing efforts to improve the SAISD middle schools, and other middle schools as well. One finding that was consistent across the schools has implications for how all the other findings are addressed. Teachers in every school rated themselves as the greatest strength in the school. In the interviews and in the comments on the surveys, they indicated they worked very hard and were committed to the success of their students. Often they mentioned they did this in spite of impediments such as the lack of appreciation and support from the school administrators and parents. Because the teachers feel they are already giving a full measure and more to their work, it is likely that any improvement efforts that require more of the teachers will be met with resistance unless they can see a clear benefit to themselves.

Closely related to this finding is the finding that the teachers did not seem to accept responsibility for some of the problems that existed within their schools, such as poor student discipline and student apathy. At the same time they were prone to claim that the existence of these problems was interfering with their effectiveness as a teacher and the academic progress of their students. This finding has two implications. First, it is likely that the problems teachers perceive as impediments to their effectiveness will be the things they would most want to deal with in any improvement efforts, but they will likely view those as problems to be resolved by someone else, not them. This leads to the second implication. There is a need in the schools for the development of the concept of a community of learners in which the school staffs accept responsibility for all aspects of the school that influence teaching and learning. In most schools the teachers do collaborate in teams but this collaboration is limited to the work of the teams and does not extend to the school as a whole.

There were several issues that were frequently identified across the schools as matters of concern to the staff in the schools. Prominent among these were: poor student discipline, lack of parental involvement and support, and problems related to serving those students with special needs, usually meaning special education programs. These issues not only make life in the schools less pleasant for teachers, they seem to interfere with the education of the students. It is essential that the schools be provided with the guidance and assistance necessary to address these issues in a manner that will provide long term solutions. The solutions will not be easy or immediate, but the process should be started as soon as possible.

In a number of schools the teachers perceived that school administrators provided poor or inadequate leadership. The quality of leadership in each of the schools must be a priority concern for the district office officials who have the responsibility for assigning school leaders. As a part of this responsibility, there is a need for in-depth information relative to the perceptions of teachers about the leadership in the schools: What is lacking in the leadership? What kinds of changes are desired and for what purpose? Can the current leaders make the necessary changes in their behavior or must there be a change in personnel?

Several issues surrounding the TAAS should be considered. Given the current emphasis on the TAAS within the state it is recognized that it is a priority concern in the schools and will surely continue to be so, but the negative impact of this emphasis must be recognized and addressed. On the one hand, teachers complain that students do not see the value of an education and they are apathetic about school. On the other hand, the extreme emphasis on TAAS preparation limits the opportunities the students have to engage in learning activities that would increase their interest in school. They also have limited opportunities to participate in activities that would develop critical thinking skills. The vision that the schools have for the future seems to be limited to improving TAAS scores. Schools must find a way to meet the demands for continuing improvement of

TAAS scores while providing educational experiences that interest and motivate students and challenge their full learning potential.

The survey item that asked how well the school served the needs of teachers was rated negatively in nine of the schools. At a time when there is an increasing shortage of qualified teachers, especially in urban districts, it is of extreme importance that every effort be made to make the schools a more desirable place in which to work. Addressing the issues described above will help do this, but there must be more communication within the schools and between the schools and the district office to understand what is needed and how it might be provided.

On the survey question that asked how well the actions of the district office had served the needs of the school, only one school gave the item a positive rating. It is apparent that the schools have a rather negative view of the services of the district office. There must be a dedicated effort to reverse this attitude for it will be very difficult for personnel in the district office to be of assistance to the schools until a bond of trust has been established. A good beginning point for developing this trust would be for the district office personnel to be visible and present in the schools and to be good listeners to what the staff have to say. In one school where one of the researchers had visited several times over the past two years, the teachers stated they had had more contact with the researcher than with anyone from the district office.

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Teaching and Learning in the Middle Schools: Lessons from an Urban Community

Focus of the Study

The principal focus of this study was the investigation of factors in middle schools that contribute to student outcomes. The study was conducted in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). The ultimate purpose of the study was to provide information for the consideration of middle school educators, and especially for SAISD officials, so they might be guided in the delivery of support and assistance to the middle schools, with the goal of enhancing student performance. In SAISD, the middle schools include grades 6-8.

The study was to investigated the factors shown below, but it was not limited to these factors:

- Influence of factors outside the individual schools— e.g., district policies and support, funding and policies from state and federal levels
- The way the school is organized to provide opportunities and encouragement for teacher collaboration
- Academic assistance available for students beyond regular classroom instruction
- The way the school is organized for the delivery of instruction
- Administrative structures and practices in the schools
- Parent/community involvement and support

SAISD Background Information

SAISD is located within the city limits of San Antonio, Texas. Also located partially or completely within the city limits of San Antonio are 12 other school districts, all surrounding SAISD. San Antonio is the second most populous city in Texas, with approximately 1,171,700 people, and it is the eighth largest city in the United States. According to *San Antonio Facts* (1999), the population of the city is 35.9 percent Anglo, 55.6 percent Spanish-language surname, 7 percent black[1], and 1.5 percent "other."

SAISD is one of the oldest school districts in the state. It was established by the city council in 1854 and was chartered as an "independent school district" by the State of Texas in 1903. This lengthy history is reflected in the age of the school facilities. Among the 17 middle schools, seven were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s. Only two middle schools have been built since 1969, both of them replacements for older schools. Many of the older schools now have portable classrooms and/or additions to the original buildings. Although the city of San Antonio continues to increase in population, SAISD is currently experiencing a decline in enrollment. Several factors contribute to this decline. Because the district is surrounded by other districts, it cannot increase its geographic boundaries, and within these boundaries there is very little room for new development, which limits growth. Also within the district are several large low-income housing developments, some of which are now being demolished and replaced with housing that is less dense and accommodates fewer families.

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[1] Terms and spelling used to describe ethnicity throughout this report are those used in the reports from which the information was taken.

SAISD has a total of 95 schools:
65 elementary schools
17 middle schools
8 high schools
5 special campuses

The 59,080 students in SAISD in 1998-1999 were composed of the following ethnic groups:
84.5 percent Hispanic
10.5 percent African American
4.7 percent White
0.2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander
0.1 percent Native American

Teaching these students were 3,738 teachers. The characteristics of the teaching force are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Teacher Characteristics

Characteristics	Percentage
Male	23.7
Female	76.3
African American	13.7
Hispanic	43.3
White	42.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5
Native American	0.1
No Degree	0.2
Bachelor's	58.6
Master's	40.9
Beginning Teachers	3.9
1-5 Years Experience	20.9
6-10 Years Experience	13.4
11-20 Years Experience	29.8
More Than 20 Years Experience	31.9

Previous Research

In an earlier study, Rutherford and Hord (2000) investigated variables that might influence student performance in the 17 SAISD middle schools. Table 2 presents variables that were included in the analyses for each school. These variables were: (1) the school— each of the 17 schools was treated as a variable, (2) the number of students, (3) three categories of student ethnicity, (4) student mobility, (5) percentage of students who were classified as economically disadvantaged, and (6) average student/teacher ratio across the school. Also included in the analyses were the teacher variables of ethnicity, degrees held, years of teaching experience, and type of certification held. Out of all these variables the only one that emerged as being statistically significantly related to student performance was the school. Students in some schools were performing better than students in other schools, but none of the above variables explained why this was so.

Table 2
School and Student Statistical Data 1998-1999

School	Number of Students	Percent African American	Percent Hispanic	Percent White	Percent Student Mobility	Percent Economically Disadvantaged	Student/ Teacher Ratio
1	702	4.7	85.6	9.3	30.6	91.5	17.0
2	559	0.2	97.9	1.8	34.7	92.1	17.0
3	1,138	45.3	47.5	6.6	22.1	82.1	17.3
4	714	28.3	69.2	2.2	35.5	82.8	16.5
5	633	0.0	98.4	1.3	29.7	83.1	15.3
6	1,009	3.3	95.4	1.1	24.1	87.5	20.2
7	812	2.5	91.4	5.8	32.9	92.6	15.2
8	624	0.0	98.1	1.9	19.8	91.2	16.5
9	689	2.3	94.5	3.0	26.1	75.9	16.1
10	734	5.6	92.0	2.5	38.9	82.4	14.6
11	860	16.5	80.2	3.1	34.9	94.4	17.9
12	526	0.4	98.3	1.1	27.7	96.4	16.6
13	470	53.6	41.9	4.5	37.4	96.0	14.7
14	950	5.6	78.1	15.8	23.6	84.7	18.1
15	898	4.0	89.9	5.2	33.2	78.8	16.9
16	856	0.6	94.2	4.9	27.8	88.8	16.9
17	1,196	0.7	94.5	4.7	19.0	85.0	16.5

Study Procedures

A goal of the study reported herein was to provide information that would help identify and explain the factors in the schools that influenced student performance.

Instrument and Interview Development

In this study two techniques were used to collect data: personal, face-to-face interviews and a 33-item survey instrument. The interviews were conducted using protocols developed specifically for this study. The survey instrument was also designed specifically for this study. To inform and guide the development of the interview protocols and the survey instrument used in this study, open-ended interviews were conducted with teachers and instructional leaders in three middle schools in an urban school district outside San Antonio. These schools and teachers were not a part of this study. The interviewees were told the purpose of the intended study and were asked to tell the researchers what kinds of questions should be asked to gain a good understanding of middle schools and the factors that influence student performance. Based on the information gained in these interviews, drafts of the interview protocol and the survey were developed, and these were taken back to some of the interviewees for their review and suggestions for modifications. The final interview protocols and the survey were then developed.

Sample of Schools for Interviews

Six of the 17 middle schools were selected as sample schools. These schools were generally representative of all SAISD middle schools in terms of level of student performance as judged by the performance of students on the state-mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Students in grades 6-8 are tested each year in reading and mathematics, and in the eighth grade they are also tested in writing, science, and social studies. District office personnel who knew the schools well selected the six schools where the interviews would be conducted.

Before the researchers contacted the schools, the superintendent of the district sent a message to each principal endorsing the study and asking for their cooperation. The leaders in each of these schools were contacted personally by the project researchers and asked to participate. All six agreed.

Conduct of Interviews

The researchers requested that the interviews at each school include at least 10 teachers, some representing the three grades and the content areas of reading and math, and some representing other instructional areas. Also, the researchers requested that arrangements be made to interview four to six students representing the three grade levels. They also interviewed the school principal and the instructional guide. Each school in SAISD is assigned an instructional guide, a non-administrative person with the responsibility for helping the teachers to improve their instruction. The interviews in the schools were conducted after the distribution of the survey.

In addition to the school interviews, interviews were conducted with five individuals in the SAISD district office and one who had recently left the district office. These six individuals had good knowledge of some or all of the middle schools. The purpose of these interviews was to gain their perceptions of the schools and the factors in the schools that influence student performance.

A total of 130 individuals were interviewed for the study: 68 teachers, 45 students, 6 principals, 5 instructional guides (one school did not have one at the time of the study), and 6 district office personnel.

All interviews were conducted individually except the student interviews. The students in each school were interviewed as a group. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were tape-recorded. In only two instances did a person decline to be recorded. In addition to the recordings, copious notes were taken using a form of the protocol that had been expanded to allow for note taking. Three protocols were developed for the interviews: one for the school personnel, one for the students, and one for the district office personnel. Copies of the protocols appear in Appendix A. One item in the school interview was modified for the principals' interview, and this modification is shown on that protocol.

Administration of the Survey

The survey instrument and the interviews were designed to collect complementary information. Included in the survey were 28 items requiring a response on a five-point Likert scale, plus five additional items not requiring a Likert scale response. Those items calling for a Likert scale response were set up for computer scoring. All items included on the survey are shown in Figure 2.

The researchers made personal contact with the principal in each of the 17 middle schools, explained the study, and asked him or her to identify a person in the school who would be responsible for distributing and collecting the surveys. They then contacted this person and made arrangements to collect the survey data in each school. On a given date a packet was delivered personally to the contact person. This packet contained a survey for each professional staff person in the building, a cover letter explaining the study, and an envelope in which to seal the completed survey. The respondents were not asked to give names or identifying data. They were asked to return their sealed envelope to the contact person in each school. Once the deadline for completion of the surveys was past, the researchers made a second personal visit to all schools to collect the completed surveys. They believed that this personal and direct approach to distribution and collection of the surveys would result in a higher return rate.

Data from the SAISD personnel office indicated that the 17 middle schools employed a total of 920 professionals. In some schools, the number of professional personnel that the school claimed differed from the number provided by the personnel office, but in these cases there was often no agreement within the school on the actual number of professional personnel. The precise number of professional personnel in each school at the time the surveys were administered was not determined. For purposes of data analysis, the number of 920 possible respondents was used. A total of 555 surveys were returned, for a return rate of 60.33 percent. This return rate is sufficiently high to place confidence in the findings. The return rate by school ranged from 26.09 percent to 100 percent with 12 of the 17 schools having a return of 50 percent or better. Table 3 shows the return rate for each school. Some caution should be exercised in using the data from the several schools with a low rate of return.

Table 3
Percentage of Survey Returns by School

School	Return Percentage
1	26.09
2	89.47
3	57.89
4	75.00
5	58.70
6	73.77
7	44.26
8	50.00
9	57.78
10	46.81
11	33.87
12	60.87
13	28.95
14	100
15	79.03
16	52.54
17	71.43
Total	60.33

Data Analysis

Data Classification

The researchers identified 10 categories of influence on student performance, based on the information gained in the exploratory interviews conducted in preparation for developing the interview protocols and the survey instrument. These categories, shown in Figure 1, were then explored through questions in the interviews and the survey, and they were used when analyzing the data. Under each category are inquiries from the interviews and the survey that address that category.

Figure 1
Categories of Influence on Student Performance with Inquiries from Interviews and the Survey

- Indicates an inquiry from interviews. Otherwise statements are survey inquiries.

LEADERSHIP
We have few discipline problems.
Teachers are supported by the school administration.
Administrators involve teachers appropriately in decision-making.
Our principal provides effective leadership for our school.
Progress toward school goals and expectations is continually monitored by our school leader(s).

- How do you see the influence of your school administrators, especially the principal, on what this school is like for teachers and students?

INSTRUCTIONAL INFLUENCES

The school provides adequate resources for instruction.
Teachers are given adequate support for students in their classrooms who have special needs.
In our school TAAS has a major influence on instruction.
Extra academic assistance is available to students as needed.
Teachers have freedom in designing instruction for students.
Adequate time and support are provided for teachers to learn and use new programs that are introduced into our school.

- We are interested in how new programs are managed in schools. How are changes in this school introduced and supported?

(From the student interviews)

- If students are having trouble with their schoolwork, can they easily get extra help from teachers?
- Do your teachers spend much time in class preparing you to take the TAAS test?

TEACHER ROLES

Teachers take advantage of professional development opportunities.
Teachers encourage, collaborate with, and support each other.

- To what extent is the voice of teachers acknowledged and respected?
- In what ways do teachers collaborate with each other?

TEACHER ATTITUDES

Teachers enjoy teaching here.
Teachers believe their efforts make a major difference in the success of this school.
Teachers have a strong commitment to ensuring the success of every student.

- What is life like for teachers and students in this school?
- Would you say this is a school where teachers enjoy working? Why?

VISION AND EXPECTATIONS

Expectations for students are high, clear, and adhered to consistently.
Teachers and administrators have a shared set of goals and expectations that drive instruction and interactions with students.

- Do you feel there is a common vision for where this school is going that is shared by teachers and administrators?
- Are expectations for teachers and students clear and well known? If yes, ask if they are regularly acknowledged, accepted, and followed.

ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

Our school offers many different kinds of extracurricular activities for students.
Students are respected by teachers and administrators.
Students like to come to school.
How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of students?

- To what extent do students have a voice in what happens in this school?
- Do students like coming to school here? Why?

(From the student interviews)

- Do you like coming to school here?
- Are students given an opportunity to say what they would like to have happen in the school?
- In this school, are students respected by teachers and administrators?
- Do you have a lot of extracurricular activities such as clubs, band, sports, that you can participate in? Do many students participate in these types of activities?

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

Parents participate in school decisions that affect the education of their children.
Parents are supportive of the school's efforts to educate their children.
Our school actively pursues ways to increase parental involvement and support.
(From the student interviews)
•Do parents have much influence on what happens in this school? Explain.

ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Classes are arranged and scheduled satisfactorily.
One open-ended question on the survey gave respondents an opportunity to indicate the types of organizational arrangements that exist in their school.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Actions by district office personnel serve the needs of this school.
•Are there factors outside your school, such as state mandates, district policies, parental involvement, etc., that have an influence on what kind of school this is? Explain.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHERS

How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of teachers?

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

Shown below are inquiries from the interviews and surveys that could generate responses that might be classified under several categories. The first four items were open-ended questions on the survey, the other items were a part of the interviews.

If you could change two things in your school to make your work more effective and pleasant, what would they be?
If you could change two things in the school to make it more effective in serving students, what would they be?
What is the greatest strength of your school?
What is the greatest weakness of you school?

(From school interviews)
•If you could change two things in your school to improve it, what would they be?
•What factor has the greatest influence on what this school is like?
•If you were talking to someone about your school who does not know the school, what would you tell them?
•How does your school compare with other middle schools in SAISD?

(From district office interviews)
•Which middle schools in SAISD would you rate as the best, those most in need of improvement, and those in the middle?
•What is most needed to make the middle schools in SAISD even better than they are?

(From student interviews) Most of the questions on this interview could generate responses under several categories.

Survey Data Analysis and Findings

Analyses of Mean Scores from the Survey

Table 4 shows the mean scores for each survey item for each school and the mean score for all schools combined. Items 4, 5, 7, and 8, which called for written responses, are presented in the next section. Responses to item 6 are shown later, in Table 7.

When considering the scores in Table 4 it is useful to remember that a five-point scale was used in the survey for items 1A-1Z and items 2 and 3, and the survey was constructed so that a score of 5 would be a high or positive score and 1 would be a low or negative score. The items may be found in Figure 2. The midpoint on the scale is 3.00. Scores below this number can be considered to be on the low or negative end of the scale and scores above 3.00 can be considered to be on the high or positive end of the scale. The one exception might be item 1G, which asks about the emphasis on TAAS. A high score indicated high emphasis on TAAS, but information from the interviews indicated that many individuals did not consider the emphasis on TAAS to be desirable or positive.

The mean scores from the survey were analyzed and discussed in seven ways: (1) mean scores for all schools combined, (2) consistency of scores within a school, (3) range of mean scores by item by school, (4) test for significant differences, (5) item by item by school, (6) item scores across schools, and (7) mean scores by category by school.

Table 4
Mean Score for Survey Items

1. Thinking of your school, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the following scale:
Strongly Agree=5 4 3 2 1=Strongly Disagree

Schools

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	All Schools
A	Expectations for students are high, clear, and adhered to consistently.																	
	*3.00	3.20	3.18	*2.47	*3.12	4.53	*2.74	3.96	4.08	3.32	3.43	*2.59	*2.18	3.37	3.31	*2.59	3.50	3.29
B	Classes are arranged and scheduled satisfactorily.																	
	2.92	3.65	3.19	*2.67	2.96	4.47	3.04	3.43	3.92	2.91	3.29	*2.18	3.55	3.90	3.04	*2.66	3.38	3.31
C	Extra academic assistance is available to students as needed.																	
	3.75	3.88	3.43	*3.11	3.96	4.76	3.56	4.09	3.96	3.95	4.00	3.79	*2.36	3.92	3.31	3.50	3.95	3.77
D	The school provides adequate resources for instruction.																	
	3.25	3.45	3.05	*2.44	3.59	4.56	3.15	3.13	3.58	*2.86	3.05	3.39	*2.27	3.84	2.94	2.97	3.77	3.36
E	Adequate time and support are provided for teachers to learn and use new programs that are introduced into our school.																	
	2.75	2.79	2.55	2.50	2.78	3.24	2.48	2.78	3.38	2.64	2.57	3.07	*2.00	3.33	2.90	2.22	3.21	2.86
F	We have few discipline problems.																	
	*2.50	*1.97	*1.80	*1.42	*2.07	3.16	*1.70	3.83	3.46	*2.05	*2.38	*1.74	*1.00	*2.10	*1.22	*1.59	*2.16	2.10
G	In our school TAAS has a major influence on instruction.																	
	4.50	4.35	3.93	3.54	3.74	4.29	4.22	4.43	4.58	4.29	4.57	4.41	4.09	4.18	4.25	4.22	3.93	4.17
H	Teachers are supported by the school administration.																	
	3.25	*2.68	*2.80	*2.53	3.27	4.29	*3.11	3.96	4.15	*2.91	3.57	*2.46	*2.73	3.87	*2.96	*2.56	3.26	3.24
I	Administrators involve teachers appropriately in decision-making.																	
	3.75	3.09	*2.48	*2.67	3.15	3.84	2.89	4.00	3.77	*2.59	3.00	*2.00	*2.45	3.58	2.98	*2.58	*2.77	3.05
J	Actions by district office personnel serve the needs of the school.																	
	2.58	2.59	2.36	2.50	2.85	2.86	2.33	2.70	3.31	2.38	2.67	2.50	2.45	2.60	2.44	2.50	2.71	2.61
K	Our principal provides effective leadership for the school.																	
	3.67	*3.03	*2.95	*2.42	3.92	4.60	*3.00	3.86	4.08	*2.82	3.57	*2.86	*2.27	3.94	*3.00	*2.74	*3.02	3.32
L	Teachers and administrators have a shared set of goals and expectations that drive instruction and interactions with students.																	
	3.92	*2.91	*2.73	*2.74	3.52	4.18	*2.93	3.91	3.88	*2.95	3.19	*2.86	2.82	3.65	3.08	*2.56	3.20	3.24
M	Progress towards these goals and expectations is continually monitored by our school leaders.																	
	4.00	*3.00	*2.77	*2.77	3.48	4.20	3.11	3.96	3.88	3.41	3.38	3.21	*2.82	3.69	*3.04	*2.63	*2.89	3.28
N	Teachers enjoy teaching here.																	
	*2.83	*2.82	*2.82	*2.22	3.41	4.04	3.00	3.78	3.77	*2.73	3.05	*2.14	*1.09	3.45	3.06	*2.28	3.21	3.04
O	Teachers have freedom in designing instruction for students.																	
	3.58	2.91	3.30	3.03	3.31	3.56	3.41	3.57	3.73	2.36	2.76	3.00	*2.00	3.66	3.04	2.81	3.69	3.25
P	Teachers believe their efforts make a major difference in the success of this school.																	
	3.73	*2.97	*3.02	*2.54	3.41	4.27	*2.96	4.00	3.88	3.33	3.29	*2.93	*2.18	3.45	3.19	*2.68	3.69	3.31

Schools

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	All Schools
Q	Teachers have a strong commitment to ensuring the success of every student.																	
	3.92	3.65	3.59	3.44	3.89	4.53	3.74	4.00	4.15	3.95	3.67	3.81	3.45	3.82	3.82	3.38	3.86	3.82
R	Teachers take advantage of professional development opportunities.																	
	3.25	3.36	3.45	3.28	3.59	3.96	3.30	3.57	3.92	3.14	3.19	3.54	3.18	3.52	3.71	3.28	3.65	3.51
S	Teachers encourage, collaborate with and support each other.																	
	3.42	3.71	3.30	•3.23	3.96	3.87	3.96	4.17	4.23	•3.05	3.81	3.57	3.27	3.79	3.65	•2.91	3.34	3.60
T	Teachers are given adequate support for students in their classrooms who have special needs.																	
	3.08	2.44	2.45	•1.89	3.11	3.27	•1.74	2.27	2.92	2.64	2.76	2.54	2.09	3.27	•2.04	2.19	2.50	2.57
U	Students are respected by teachers and administrators.																	
	3.92	3.32	3.39	3.11	3.48	4.18	3.33	3.91	4.04	3.64	3.38	3.79	3.45	3.69	3.41	•2.84	3.64	3.56
V	Students like to come to school.																	
	3.67	3.15	3.39	•2.39	3.00	3.78	3.07	3.65	3.81	2.91	3.14	3.36	•2.18	3.23	2.98	2.75	3.47	3.21
W	Our school offers many different kinds of extracurricular activities for students.																	
	4.17	•3.09	3.77	•3.08	3.44	3.78	3.48	•2.43	3.65	3.23	3.29	•3.04	3.27	3.52	•2.51	3.53	4.20	3.40
X	Parents participate in school decisions that affect the education of their children.																	
	1.92	2.35	2.70	1.91	2.44	2.78	2.48	1.95	2.81	•1.86	2.95	2.29	•1.18	2.82	2.16	•1.84	3.04	2.45
Y	Parents are supportive of the school's efforts to educate their children.																	
	•2.17	2.45	3.27	•2.03	2.48	3.09	•2.30	2.39	3.23	•1.95	2.86	2.36	•1.36	2.84	2.53	•2.25	3.20	2.65
Z	Our school actively pursues ways to increase parental involvement and support.																	
	4.50	3.15	3.18	•2.97	3.56	3.98	•3.04	•3.04	3.65	3.77	3.48	•3.07	•2.82	4.02	•2.84	3.28	3.16	3.37

Rating scale for questions 2 & 3:
Very Good=5 4 3 2 1=Poor

Schools

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	All Schools
2	How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of students?																	
	3.67	3.32	3.34	•2.50	3.48	4.53	3.37	4.04	4.04	•3.18	3.48	3.32	•2.00	3.84	3.22	•2.70	3.73	3.48
3	How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of teachers?																	
	3.00	•2.38	2.91	•2.33	3.15	4.07	2.74	3.30	3.54	•2.45	3.10	•2.39	•2.00	3.60	2.84	•2.20	3.20	2.99

* Indicates schools with scores significantly lower (.05) than school with the highest mean score.

1. **Mean scores for all schools**. From a preview of the means scores for all schools combined, the following observations can be made:

• Only one item has a score at or above 4.00 (4.17), and that is item 1G, which indicates the emphasis placed on TAAS in the schools. Clearly, TAAS is being strongly emphasized in the middle schools.
• The wide difference between the high and low mean scores indicates that the respondents were discriminating in their responses to the individual items.
• For the 28 survey items, responses are above 3.00 on 21 of them, which is 75 percent of the items. This indicates that the respondents were generally positive about the issues addressed in the survey. It is important to note that even within this positive range there were differences that should not be ignored. For example, the score of 3.04 on item 1N is somewhat different from the score of 3.82 on item 1Q.
• The six items that were rated below 3.00 address several different issues. The lowest score (2.10) is for item 1F, which addresses the matter of student discipline. This indicates that student discipline is a major problem in the schools, a finding that is supported by data presented below from the narrative responses to the survey.

Item 1E concerns time and support for implementing new programs. Item 1J reflects on actions taken by district office personnel to serve the school. Information from the interviews indicated there is a connection between these two items. Among those interviewed in the schools, some felt that the district imposed too many changes on the schools and often those changes disappeared before they had enough time to know if they worked.

The way teachers felt about the support they receive was indicated in several items. Expressed in response to item 1T, and in other study data, was a need for more help and support in working with special-needs students. Items 1X and 1Y reflect a concern that was widespread in the middle schools: the lack of parent involvement and support.

A final survey item that showed a low rating (2.99) was question number 3. This item reflects the opinion the teachers have about the way their needs are met in their school. Related to this is item 1N, which shows how much teachers enjoyed teaching in their school. While the score on this item is slightly positive (3.04), these two items together suggest that teachers were not really satisfied with their teaching situations.

2. **Consistency of scores within a school.** The results on this measure can also be informative. For example, for School 6 the difference between high and low item scores (4.53 to 3.16) is 1.37, while the difference between high and low scores in school 13 is 3.09. The smaller the difference in scores, the more indicative it is that the opinions of the staff in the school were similar across items. The reverse is true for large score differences.

3. **Range of mean scores by item by school.** Looking at the mean scores for each item for individual schools can provide some useful insights. Schools 6, 9, and 16 serve as examples. Respondents in Schools 6 and 9 rated only 2 of the 28 items below 3.00. It can be said that the personnel in these schools were quite positive, at least in relation to the issues included in the survey. Respondents in School 16 rated 22 of the 28 items below 3.00, indicating a generally negative feeling about the issues addressed in the survey.

4. **Test for significant differences.** To determine which schools, if any, varied significantly on each item from the school with the highest mean, a Student-Newman-Keuls multiple range test was conducted on data in Table 4. The schools with an asterisk by the item score were schools that had scores significantly lower than the school with the highest score. Where there is no asterisk, there was no statistically significant difference from the high school. This analysis shows that four schools— 4, 10, 13, and 16— had scores lower than the highest score on more than 40

percent of the items. Five schools— 2, 3, 7, 12, and 15— had lower scores on 25 percent or more of the items. Differences on individual items must be considered carefully, for they cannot all be interpreted in the same manner. For example, on item 1F, related to discipline problems, 15 of the 17 schools have scores significantly lower than the highest score. On this item, the 15 schools are more representative of the SAISD middle schools than are the two schools with the higher scores. On items such as 1H, 1I, and 1K, where 7 to 10 schools differed from the highest school, these data indicate there are two distinct groups of schools on these items. Of course, attention should be given to the content of the individual items. The three items shown immediately above all have to do with leadership in the schools, and the differences suggest that some schools are perceived as having better leadership than other schools. Likewise, the findings indicate that the same interpretation could be applied to items 1A and 1L, which are related to the issue of goals and expectations. On this issue one group of schools scored significantly lower than the rest of the schools.

5. **Item by item by school.** It is essential that careful attention be given to each item response for an individual school. How a particular school has responded to an item is probably the best guide for providing assistance and support. It is not feasible in this report to provide an item by item by item analysis for each school. Further, the actions that might be appropriate in relation to a particular item are best identified by those who work in and with the schools. For example, Schools 4, 12, and 16 all gave a rather low rating to item 1B, which asked about their satisfaction with the arrangement of classes and schedules. Exactly what the staff in these three schools find unsatisfactory and what changes they would want might be very different in each school, but it is apparent that this is an issue that should be addressed and resolved. A first step in the solution is for the school to recognize and accept the existence of the problem. Next, it would behoove the staff in each school to seek first their own solution to the problem. If they are unable to arrive at a solution, then they should seek outside assistance. District office personnel who serve the schools should also be aware of the problem and should monitor the school to ensure that actions are being taken to address the issue.

6. **Item scores across schools.** When considering scores for a particular item across schools, there is almost always a difference of at least 1.00 between the highest and lowest scores, and often the difference is as great as 2.00. Table 5. shows the two highest scores and the two lowest scores for each item, as well as the schools for the scores. The data reveal several patterns of scores. On 16 of the items, School 6 had the highest score, and on 18 of the 28 items (64 percent) it had the highest or second highest score. School 9 was highest on 6 of the items and second highest on 11 of the items. On the other hand, School 13 had the lowest or next to lowest score on 17 of the items (61 percent). School 4 was at the low end of the mean scores on 13 of the items (46 percent). Another useful way of looking at scores across schools is shown by Table 4. For example, the scores on item 1R are rather consistent across the schools with the range being from 3.14 to 3.96, indicating all schools rate that item similarly. On items 1H, 1L, and 1N the mean for all schools is above 3.00, but on each of these items 8 of the 17 schools (47 percent) rate the item below 3.00, and the range between the high and low scores is rather large. It can be concluded that there is much variation among schools on the issue represented by the item.

Table 5
High and Low Mean Scores from the Survey

Item	High Mean	School	2nd High Mean	School	Low Mean	School	2nd Low Mean	School
A	4.53	6	4.08	9	2.18	13	2.47	4
B	4.47	6	3.92	9	2.18	12	2.66	16
C	4.76	6	4.00	11	2.36	13	3.11	4
D	4.56	6	3.84	14	2.27	13	2.44	4
E	3.38	9	3.33	14	2.00	13	2.22	16
F	3.83	8	3.46	9	1.00	13	1.22	15
G	4.58	9	4.57	11	3.54	4	3.74	5
H	4.29	6	4.15	9	2.46	12	2.53	4
I	3.84	6	3.77	9	2.00	12	2.45	13
J	3.31	9	2.86	6	2.33	7	2.36	3
K	4.60	6	4.08	9	2.27	13	2.42	4
L	4.18	6	3.92	1	2.56	16	2.73	3
M	4.20	6	4.00	1	2.63	16	2.77	3&4
N	4.04	6	3.78	8	1.09	13	2.22	4
O	3.73	9	3.66	14	2.00	13	2.36	10
P	4.27	6	4.00	9	2.18	13	2.54	4
Q	4.53	6	4.15	9	3.14	9	3.19	10
R	3.96	6	3.92	9	3.14	10	3.18	13
S	4.23	9	4.17	8	2.91	16	3.05	10
T	3.27	6&13	3.11	5	1.74	7	1.89	4
U	4.18	6	4.04	9	2.84	16	3.11	4
V	3.81	9	3.78	6	2.18	13	2.39	4
W	4.20	17	4.17	1	2.43	8	2.51	13
X	3.04	17	2.95	11	1.18	13	1.84	16
Y	3.27	3	3.20	17	1.36	13	1.95	10
Z	4.50	1	4.02	14	2.82	13	2.84	15
2	4.53	6	4.04	8&9	2.00	13	2.50	4
3	4.07	6	3.60	14	2.00	13	2.20	16

The district office personnel were asked to name the middle schools that they considered to be most in need of improvement and those that were the better ones in the district. The interviewees were told they could use any factors they wished for making the judgments. Whether the factors they used were related to the survey items is not known, but their responses bear a relationship to the survey outcomes. Schools 4 and 13 were the two named as most in need of improvement.

School 6 was named as one of the better schools. The data in Table 5 support these assessments by the district office personnel. Schools 4 and 13 often have mean scores lower than the other schools. School 6 has more high mean scores than any school. School 9 was not named in the district office interviews as one of the better schools, but it had more high mean scores than any school other than School 6.

7. **Mean scores by category by school.** Each survey item with its category designation is shown below in Figure 2. Table 6 presents the mean scores for each of the 10 categories by school and for all schools combined. The 10 categories are identified as follows:

Leadership	L	Environment for Students in School	ESS
Instructional Influences	I I	Community Involvement and Support	CIS
Teacher Roles	TR	Organizational Arrangements	OA
Teacher Attitudes	TA	External Influences	EI
Vision and Expectations	VE	School Environment for Teachers	SET

Figure 2
The Middle School Survey with Category Designations

1. Thinking of your school, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (see Table 4).

Item	Category
A. Expectations for students are high, clear, and adhered to consistently.	VE
B. Classes are arranged and scheduled satisfactorily.	OA
C. Extra academic assistance is available to students as needed.	I I
D. The school provides adequate resources for instruction.	I I
E. Adequate time and support are provided for teachers to learn and use new programs that are introduced into our school.	I I
F. We have few discipline problems.	L
G. In our school TAAS has a major influence on instruction.	I I
H. Teachers are supported by the school administration.	L
I. Administrators involve teachers appropriately in decisionmaking.	L
J. Actions by district office personnel serve the needs of the school.	E I
K. Our principal provides effective leadership for the school.	L
L. Teachers and administrators have a shared set of goals and expectations that drive instruction and interactions with students.	VE
M. Progress toward these goals and expectations is continually monitored by our school leaders.	L
N. Teachers enjoy teaching here.	TA
O. Teachers have freedom in designing instruction for students.	I I

P. Teachers believe their efforts make a major difference in the success of this school.	TA
Q. Teachers have a strong commitment to ensuring the success of every student.	TA
R. Teachers take advantage of professional development opportunities.	TR
S. Teachers encourage, collaborate with, and support each other.	TR
T. Teachers are given adequate support for students in their classrooms who have special needs.	I I
U. Students are respected by teachers and administrators.	ESS
V. Students like to come to school.	ESS
W. Our school offers many different kinds of extracurricular activities for students.	ESS
X. Parents participate in school decisions that affect the education of their children.	CIS
Y. Parents are supportive of the school's efforts to educate their children.	CIS
Z. Our school actively pursues ways to increase parental involvement and support.	CIS
2. How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of students?	ESS
3. How would you rate your school in terms of the way it serves the needs of teachers?	SET

Items 4-8 are shown below, but the analysis of responses from items 4, 5, 7, and 8 is not shown until the next section of this report.

4. If you could change two things in your school to make your work more effective and pleasant, what would they be?
5. If you could change two things that would make your school more effective in serving students, what would they be?
6. Please mark the organizational arrangements that exist in your school (check all that apply).
    Academic teaming
    Block scheduling
    Organized by subject areas
    Organized by grade level
    Other (Please describe)
7. What is the greatest strength of your school?
8. What is the greatest weakness of your school?

Comments

When considering the category scores in Table 6, two facts should be noted in relation to these scores. Item 1G, regarding TAAS emphasis, is listed under the category of Instructional Influences, but it is separated out from that category and listed as a separate category in this table. This was done because the comments of people in the schools led to uncertainty about how this score would or should be interpreted. Some saw a high score on this item as being positive, while others considered it to be negative. Also, the category of Community Involvement and Support has been divided into two sections, A and B. Section A reports how much parental support and involvement the respondents believed the school receives, and section B indicates how the respondents rated their efforts to promote parent support and involvement. This separation was made when a review of the data revealed rather large differences in the two parts of this category.

When the items are grouped by categories, as in Table 6, a pattern of outcomes emerges that is different from the individual item scores and offers a different perspective on the survey scores. When reviewing the data in Table 6 it is most informative to look at the mean scores for all schools and these in connection with the mean scores for individual schools.

By far the highest mean score (4.17) for all schools combined is the one reflecting a heavy emphasis on TAAS. The scores for Teacher Roles (3.55) and Teacher Attitudes (3.39) are among the next highest scores. These two categories reflect how the professionals in the schools felt about their work and their commitment to it. Another indication of how the school respondents felt is seen in the category of Community Involvement and Support, part B. Staff members in the schools rated their efforts to promote involvement and support positively, while rating the participation of the community negatively. Evident in these scores is the tendency of the staff members to rate their personal efforts favorably. This tendency is reinforced by the written responses to item 7 on the survey. That question asked, What is the greatest strength of the school? Overwhelmingly, teachers rated themselves as the greatest strength. At the same time, teachers rate the School Environment for Teachers in the negative range (2.99). Teachers also rated the School Environment for Students some what higher (3.41) than their own environment.

The category of Leadership reveals some interesting relationships. In interviews, the district office personnel reported a strong belief that to have a good school you must have good leadership at the school level. This belief is supported by evidence in many professional publications. If school leadership is vital to a good school, the mean score for all schools in the category of Leadership (3.00) is not particularly encouraging. It is even less encouraging when the Leadership scores for each school are considered. In 10 of the 17 schools the mean scores were below 3.00, ranging as low as 2.26. A relationship with Leadership scores is apparent in other categories. In 9 of the 10 schools where Leadership is rated in the negative area, the category of School Environment for Teachers is also rated below 3.00. In each of the seven schools where Vision and Expectations was rated negatively, Leadership was also rated negatively.

The range of scores in the categories should be considered along with the individual mean scores. The variations in the Leadership category that were discussed above offer one example of why this should be done. The importance of looking at the score range is even more evident in the category of Vision and Expectations. Here the mean score for all schools is 3.27, but the school scores range from 4.36 to 2.09. This score spread shows that there are great differences among the schools in what they perceive to be happening with regard to development and clarity of vision and expectations in their school. On the other hand, the ratings for TAAS and Community Involvement and Support, part A, are rather consistent. All but two schools rated the TAAS item at a fraction below 4.00 or above. Regarding Community Involvement and Support, two schools rated the category slightly above 3.00 and all others rated it below 3.00. Apparently the lack of involvement and support from the community (usually meaning parents) is a widespread problem among the middle schools. It would be of interest to know what steps have been taken to develop the desired involvement and support. With this information it would then be feasible to develop programs and strategies that could be used across the schools. Such an effort could be initiated, supported, and encouraged by the district office.

In the category of External Influences, the survey asked how well the district office served the schools. The rating of 2.61 suggests that there is a need for officials in the district office to improve their interactions with the middle schools. Addressing the problem of community support and involvement would be a productive place to begin.

Table 6
Mean Scores by Category by School

Category		School																	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	All
Leadership		3.43	2.75	2.56	2.36	3.18	4.02	2.76	3.92	3.87	2.76	3.18	2.45	2.26	3.44	2.64	2.43	2.82	3.00
Instructional influences		3.28	3.09	2.96	2.59	3.35	3.88	2.87	3.17	3.51	2.89	3.03	3.16	2.14	3.60	2.85	2.74	3.42	3.16
Teacher roles		3.34	3.53	3.38	3.26	3.78	3.92	3.63	3.87	3.58	3.10	3.50	3.56	3.23	3.67	3.68	3.10	3.60	3.55
Teacher attitudes		3.49	3.15	3.14	2.73	3.57	4.28	3.23	3.93	3.93	3.37	3.34	2.96	2.24	3.57	3.36	2.78	3.59	3.39
Vision/expectations		3.46	3.06	2.96	2.60	3.32	4.36	2.86	3.94	3.98	2.09	3.31	2.73	2.50	3.51	3.19	2.58	3.35	3.27
Community involvement/support	A	2.05	2.40	2.99	1.97	2.46	2.94	2.39	2.17	3.02	1.91	2.91	2.33	1.27	2.83	2.35	2.05	3.12	2.55
	B	4.50	3.15	3.18	2.97	3.56	3.98	3.04	3.04	3.65	3.77	3.48	3.07	2.82	4.02	2.84	3.28	3.16	3.37
Organizational arrangements		2.92	3.65	3.19	2.67	2.96	4.47	3.04	3.43	3.92	2.91	3.29	2.18	3.55	3.90	3.04	2.66	3.38	3.31
External influences		2.58	2.59	2.36	2.50	2.85	2.86	2.33	2.70	3.31	2.38	2.67	2.50	2.45	2.60	2.44	2.50	2.71	2.61
School environment for students		3.86	3.22	3.50	2.77	3.31	4.07	3.31	3.51	3.89	3.24	3.32	3.38	2.73	3.57	3.03	2.96	3.76	3.41
School environment for teachers		3.00	2.38	2.91	2.33	3.15	4.07	2.74	3.30	3.54	2.45	3.10	2.39	2.00	3.60	2.84	2.20	3.20	2.99
TAAS		4.50	4.35	3.93	3.54	3.74	4.29	4.22	4.43	4.58	4.29	4.57	4.41	4.09	4.18	4.25	4.22	3.93	4.17

Organizational Arrangements

Item 6 on the survey listed four types of organizational arrangements that were known to exist in middle schools: (a) academic teaming, (b) block scheduling, (c) subject-area organization, and (d) grade-level organization. The respondents were requested to check all items that applied. Item E provided the opportunity to describe any other arrangements that existed in the school. Responses to item 6 are shown in Table 7. The numbers indicate the actual number of individuals who checked the item; they are not mean scores.

Quite frankly, the interpretation and meaning of these data are not at all clear. It might be assumed that if academic teaming were operative in a school, most teachers would be involved, but in Schools 3, 6, 8, and 9, only a small portion of the total number of respondents indicated that they were engaged in this arrangement, data that would suggest that in some schools one or two academic teams are in place, but the practice is not common to the school. In the area of block scheduling, it would seem unlikely that some of the faculty operated on such a schedule while others did not. The responses in three Schools— 6, 7, and 16— indicated they do not have block scheduling, but in Schools 3, 13, and 14, a few of the respondents checked block scheduling while most did not. It would seem likely that the variations in the responses to the options in item 6 were attributable to differences in interpretations of the terms as they applied to the respondent. For example, the interviews revealed that teachers of special subjects, such as music, art, library, and physical education, were often grouped together as a team, but they did not describe it as an academic team.

In spite of the confusion that surrounds some of the responses, one finding is clear: academic teaming, organization by subject area, and organization by grade level are common among the schools. It is also apparent that block scheduling exists in at least 11 of the 17 schools. Three schools apparently do not employ block scheduling, and in three others, it is not clear whether it is present.

The responses to the "Other" option in item 6 were of two kinds, either simply "teaming" or an indication that it was a magnet school.

Table 7
Responses to Survey Item #6

6. Please mark the organizational arrangements that exist in your school. (Check all that apply)

	Schools																	
Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	All Schools
A	Academic teaming																	
	6	29	4	17	19	11	26	21	8	18	17	22	8	61	44	19	47	
B	Block scheduling																	
	12	32	3	34	26	0	0	22	24	22	19	27	3	1	45	0	55	
C	Organized by subject areas																	
	7	13	23	13	12	41	15	10	18	9	11	8	6	28	15	22	28	
D	Organized by grade levels																	
	12	31	30	18	15	18	26	14	8	16	20	12	10	41	28	22	34	
E	Other (Please describe)																	
	0	0	1	2	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	.0	4	

Analysis of Frequency Data

For each of the 28 Likert scale items on the survey, a frequency count was conducted, indicating how many respondents marked each of the five levels of response (1-5) on each item. The results from this analysis were considered in two ways. The first object was to determine if any major splits in responses occurred for any item in any school. An extreme split would be if half of the respondents gave the item a rating of 1 and the other half gave it a rating of 5. Of course, smaller splits could occur, with a rating being between 2 and 5 or between 1 and 4, or a smaller percentage of the respondents assigning the extreme ratings. When such splits do occur, they reflect a definite division among the staff regarding the issue reflected in the item, a situation that may portend a problem that extends beyond the mean scores for the item and that should be recognized and addressed by the school leadership. Fortunately, no such splits were found in the data; the responses tended to cluster around two adjacent ratings.

A second use of the frequency data was to investigate the spread of ratings on each item for each school. Should all ratings within a school be confined to two levels, say 3 and 4, it could be concluded that the opinions of the staff were very similar regarding that item. If all five rating levels were used, it would signal greater differences in the opinions of the staff. For the most part, the respondents in all schools used four or five levels of ratings. On 27 of the 28 items, respondents in Schools 4 and 17 used all five levels. At the other end of the spectrum, School 9 used five levels on only five items. Respondents in School 1 used only three levels of ratings on 6 of the 28 items, the greatest number of three-level ratings.

While there were no major splits in the survey responses in any school, a range of opinions was evident on many issues. For those responsible for addressing the issues represented in the survey, this is an important finding to recognize. It means that it would be unwise, if not counterproductive, to take actions that assume the staff members in the schools are of like mind on the issues. Just as individualization is necessary for students, so it must be for the professional staff.

Analysis of Qualitative Survey Data

On the survey there were four items, numbers 4, 5, 7, and 8, that requested a specific written response. Additionally, respondents were invited to add any comments they wished. The researchers independently recorded each response for each item for each school. Next they determined if there were responses that might be grouped under a particular heading or descriptor. There was no pre-identification of the descriptors and no limit on how many there might be. The content of the responses determined the descriptors. Once this work was accomplished individually, the researchers worked together to review all items and all descriptors, resulting in the descriptors that are presented in Tables 8-11. In every school for every item there were miscellaneous comments. Only when the responses grouped together represented 10 percent or more of the total number of responses to the item were they reported. This approach was taken because the researchers believed that random or miscellaneous responses would not be particularly helpful, and could even be distracting, when deciding on actions to be taken with regard to a particular question or issue. It is emphasized that the percentages in the table were based on the number of responses, not the number of respondents.

Table 8
Responses to Survey Question #4

If you could change two things in your school to make your work more effective and more pleasant, what would they be?

School	# of responses	Descriptors				
1.	18	Discipline (22%)	Smaller classes (17%)	Staffing (17%)		
2.	50	Discipline (28%)	Administration/leadership (24%)	Better communication (10%)		
3.	63	Discipline (29%)	Administration/leadership (13%)			
4.	50	Discipline (26%)	Administration/leadership (10%)			
5.	27	Discipline (22%)	Parental concerns (15%)			
6.	58	Discipline (21%)	More time to plan and learn (14%)	Improve relationships among staff (12%)	Changes suggested for central office (10%)	Special education program (10%)
7.	44	Discipline (32%)	Special education program (14%)			
8.	30	Less paperwork (30%)	Special education program (17%)		Better communication (13%)	Scheduling (10%)
9.	36	Less paperwork (14%)	Discipline (14%)	Better resources/ facilities (14%)		
10.	39	Instruction/instructional support (28%)	Less paperwork (18%)			
11.	27	Discipline (30%)	Improve relationships among staff (19%)			
12.	38	Administration/ leadership (26%)	Improve relationships among staff (16%)			
13.	20	More professionalism (30%)	Administration/leadership (25%)	Parental concerns (15%)	Discipline (15%)	
14.	93	Discipline (37%)	Better facilities (19%)			
15.	75	Discipline (31%)	Administration/leadership (17%)	Smaller classes (12%)		
16.	38	Discipline (29%)	Administration/leadership (18%)			
17.	66	Improve relationships among staff (29%)	Administration/leadership (20%)	Discipline (15%)		

Table 9
Responses to Survey Question #5

If you could change two things that would make your school more effective in serving students, what would they be?

School	# of Responses	Descriptors				
1.	17	Management of student behavior (29%)	Parental concerns (18%)	Organization and scheduling (12%)		
2.	51	Smaller classes (18%)	Discipline (10%)			
3.	60	Discipline (20%)	Smaller classes/smaller school population (15%)			
4.	50	Smaller classes (16%)	Discipline (10%)	Administration/leadership (10%)		
5.	24	Discipline (29%)	Instruction/instructional support (25%)	Special education program (13%)		
6.	47	Instruction/instructional support (21%)	Management of student behavior (21%)	Organization and scheduling (19%)	Staffing (15%)	Parental concerns (15%)
7.	47	Special education program (32%)	Discipline (19%)	Organization and scheduling (17%)		
8.	34	Organization and scheduling (26%)	Special education program (21%)	Parental concerns (15%)	Smaller classes (12%)	
9.	34	Special education program (26%)	Parental concerns (15%)	Better technology (15%)		
10.	31	Motivating/supporting students (16%)	Instruction/instructional support (16%)			
11.	28	Discipline (32%)				
12.	38	More opportunities/support for students (32%)	Discipline (13%)			
13.	20	Instruction/instructional support (20%)	Discipline (20%)	Instruction/instructional support (20%)		
14.	89	Discipline (22%)	Smaller classes (13%)			
15.	64	Discipline (31%)	Special education program (17%)	More opportunities/ support for students (17%)		
16.	36	Discipline (28%)				
17.	66	Discipline (22%)	Special education program (17%)	More opportunities/ support for students (11%)		

Table 10
Responses to Survey Question # 7

What is the greatest strength of your school?

School	# of responses	Descriptors		
1.	11	Administration/leadership (45%)	Teachers (27%)	
2.	29	Teachers (45%)	90-minute blocks (14%)	
3.	45	Teachers (40%)	Multilingual program (24%)	Students (11%)
4.	31	Teachers (61%)		
5.	24	Teachers (54%)	Administration/leadership (29%)	Relationships among staff (13%)
6.	49	Teachers (29%)	Administration/leadership 24%)	Discipline (21%)
7.	31	Teachers (32%)	Administration/leadership (16%)	
8.	24	Teachers (29%)	Teaming/collaboration (17%)	Discipline (17%)
9.	22	Teachers (55%)	Administration/leadership (23%)	
10.	17	Teachers (82%)		
11.	18	Teachers (56%)	Administration/leadership (28%)	
12.	31	Teachers (52%)		
13.	13	Teachers (46%)		
14.	68	Teachers (46%)	Administration/leadership (22%)	Teaming/collaboration (16%)
15.	44	Teachers (64%)	Teaming/collaboration (16%)	
16.	20	Teachers (75%)		
17.	45	Teachers (60%)	Multilingual program (11%)	

Table 11
Responses to Survey Question #8

What is the greatest weakness of your school?

School	# of responses	Descriptors			
1.	10	Discipline (30%)	Parental concerns (20%)		
2.	37	Administration/leadership (27%)	Discipline (22%)	Students don't value education (11%)	Parental concerns (11%)
3.	46	Discipline (41%)	Administration/leadership (28%)		
4.	34	Discipline (29%)	Administration/leadership (26%)	Teacher attitudes (21%)	
5.	18	Discipline (33%)	Parental concerns (17%)		
6.	34	Lack of communication & collaboration (18%)	Parental concerns (18%)	More opportunities/ support for students (12%)	Administration/ leadership (12%)
7.	32	Discipline (34%)	Parental concerns (16%)		
8.	23	Parental concerns (30%)	Lack of cohesiveness and communication (22%)		
9.	19	Parental concerns (21%)	Student concerns (21%)		
10.	22	Parental concerns (27%)	Student apathy (23%)		
11.	22	Administration/leadership (36%)	Discipline (27%)		
12.	26	Teacher attitudes (39%)	Administration/leadership (35%)		
13.	14	Administration/leadership (43%)	Discipline (29%)		
14.	61	Discipline (46%)	Lack of facilities & resources (13%)		
15.	50	Discipline (44%)	Administration/leadership (12%)		
16.	27	Discipline (48%)	Relationships among staff (28%)	Administration/ leadership (19%)	
17.	45	Administration/leadership (36%)	Discipline (24%)	Teacher attitudes (24%)	

A perusal of the tables reveals several descriptors that were found frequently as areas of concern. These include: (1) discipline, (2) administration, (3) parental concerns, (4) special education program, (5) instruction/instructional support, and (6) improvement of relationships among staff. The messages contained in the responses under these descriptors were quite consistent across the schools.

1. **Discipline.** This descriptor encompassed responses that expressed a concern about poor student discipline in the school. Very often the one word "discipline" was reported. Many other responses advocated punitive measures: Get rid of consistently troubled kids. Be able to use the paddle on disrespectful students. Give teachers authority to permanently remove disruptive, unmotivated students from the classroom. Other, less frequent references were constructive in nature: Improve discipline procedures. Increase and refine discipline alternatives. Find better ways to handle chronic discipline matters that are minor. Discipline was clearly the issue of greatest concern across the schools. On questions 4, 5, and 8, which ask about changes or weaknesses, discipline was the most frequently listed descriptor.

2. **Administration/Leadership.** Included under this descriptor were any comments about the school administrators. If the comment was under question 7 (Table 10), which asked about the greatest strength of the school, the comments were positive. If the comments were under the other three questions, 4, 5 and 8, they were typically negative. Many of the negative comments referred to a lack of support from the principal, and often this was lack of support in the area of discipline. Other types of negative comments included: Principal is never on campus. Teachers get very little feedback from the administrators. Administrative actions demoralize and undermine teachers. Teachers are not treated in a professional manner by the principal. On the positive side, when asked about the greatest strength of the school regarding administration/leadership, respondents most frequently replied: "the principal." More detailed responses: The administrative support is outstanding. No other school administration, to my knowledge, is as informed and organized as ours. A great principal. It might be noted that in response to the question about the greatest weakness in the school, this category was the second most frequently mentioned after discipline.

3. **Parental Concerns.** The comments under this descriptor were fairly straightforward: Get parents involved. We need strong and consistent support from parents. More parent involvement. Better parent involvement. Some of the comments were more critical: Parents do not value education and don't help their students value it. Many parents have little or no interest in how their student is doing in school.

4. **Special Education Program.** In every school concerns were expressed about the special education program and meeting the needs of students with special needs. Some of the key issues are reflected in the following comments: Hire more special education teachers to assist general education teachers with special-needs students. Have special education services/support more often than once a week. More itinerant support persons. More special education resources, materials, and support. More support in our classroom for special-needs students. Get rid of itinerant support and have more resource classes.

5. **Instruction/Instructional Support.** The comments that were included under this descriptor varied more than those under some of the other descriptors, but they still addressed the same issue. The following examples reflect the range of comments: More training and resources as well as instructional support for teachers. We need to have more interdisciplinary teaching. We need freedom within the curriculum to be selective of those stories, segments that better fit the needs, language categories, grade levels, and learning styles of our students. We need more resources for field trips and experiences outside the school. We need a real reading specialist on each team. Students need to have access to more electives.

6. **Improve Relationships Among Staff.** As reflected in the examples below, the comments under this descriptor typically focused on teachers who were viewed negatively by other teachers or on the lack of collaboration and cooperation among the staff. Some comments were these: Reassign certain individuals who create constant dissension. Remove teachers who are not team players. Everyone needs to act and be professional at all times. We need to increase teacher collaboration. Get rid of cliques. Have some fun activities before and after school for teachers to bond. Promote more communications among the staff. Have more activities to promote unity and staff morale. The descriptor of Teacher Attitudes under question 8 for School 4 was set apart from this group because all of the comments had to do with teachers being upset about the poor attitudes of other teachers.

Many of the other groupings are rather well defined by the descriptor and need little additional elaboration, especially if they are viewed in relation to the question that was asked. In virtually every school at least a few individuals made a plea for smaller classes or reduced teacher/pupil ratio. There were also some who expressed a need for a smaller school population. In the call for Better Communication the focus was usually on communication within the school, but occasionally communication with the district office was mentioned. Given the age of many of the middle school buildings, it was not unexpected that Better Facilities would emerge as an issue. In fact, it is a bit surprising that it was not more of an issue than it was. When the respondents wrote about Less Paperwork, they did not elaborate on the kind of paperwork they had in mind; they just wrote "less paperwork." Under the descriptor of Organization and Scheduling, two kinds of comments were typical. One was an expression of displeasure with block scheduling or displeasure with the traditional schedule and a desire to change to a block schedule. The most frequent response related to a need or desire for more time in the day for planning and collaborating. Comments under the descriptor of Staffing typically expressed a request for more teachers or assistants, often in the area of special education.

There were several descriptors that focused specifically on students, and they differ in their emphasis. Management of Student Behavior refers to actions that would benefit teachers: Make students more accountable for their performance and behavior. Remove lockers so there is less visiting and social time in school. Separate the boys from the girls. Drop students who are absent too much. The comments calling for More Support and Opportunities for Students focused on actions to serve students: More activities for students. More extracurricular activities. Students need more access to teachers before and after school. More incentive programs for students. We need more vocational courses for students.

The descriptors for question 7, Table 10, show quite vividly that teachers perceive that they are the greatest strength in their schools. Additionally, in their comments the teachers often wrote of their commitment to students, their diligence in their work, and the extra time and effort they devoted to their job. Along with this, they frequently mentioned that they did all this without any expression of appreciation from the school administration. In fact, the teachers often stated that their efforts were in spite of the lack of support they received and the obstacles that were put in their way by poor leadership.

Data from the teacher comments on the survey, and from the item ratings on the survey, lead to two conclusions. (1) Teachers believe they are giving a maximum effort to their job, and in some cases more than the maximum, and without appreciation. (2) Teachers believe it is primarily because of their efforts that their school performs as well as it does. These data offer no basis for disputing such teacher perceptions. However, a troubling trend emerges from the survey data. Teachers show a strong tendency to attribute problems that exist in the schools to others, citing student apathy and discipline, lack of parent support, poor leadership, or inadequate support for special-needs students. In other words, teachers do not seem to accept any ownership of the problems, viewing them as primarily the responsibility of someone else. It may be that this finding results from the types of questions that were asked on the survey and does not accurately portray the feelings of the teachers. If there is a degree of accuracy in this finding, however, it has significant implications for efforts to improve the middle schools. These implications are discussed in a later section.

Though a final item on the survey provided an opportunity for the respondents to make any comments they wished, they offered relatively few comments. Most were a repeat of something that had been written in response to another question. For this reason the comments under this item were not dealt with separately.

Infrequently Addressed Issues
It is of interest to note issues that were mentioned infrequently or not at all on the survey, such as the curriculum, only infrequently and then in the context of complaints that it was too restrictive and prescriptive in terms of time allocations and content. Comments directed to the district office were limited, as were comments about the number and kinds of changes that had been introduced into the school. However, when these topics were mentioned, the comments were always negative. Grading and reporting procedures were notably absent in the comments, as were any comments about pay and benefits. A few comments dealt with the issue of teachers' needing more involvement in decisionmaking within the school, but these were quite limited. (More will be said about this issue in the section on interviews). Professional development was mentioned only infrequently, most often in comments calling for professional development better suited to the needs of the school, or more training in the use of technology. It is not known whether these infrequently mentioned topics were not issues of great concern in the schools or whether other issues were of greater concern. The nature of the questions on the survey limited the number of concerns that could be expressed.

Analysis of Teacher Interview Data

The researchers conducted interviews in six schools with four different groups— teachers, principals, students, and instructional guides. In addition, interviews were conducted with district office personnel. A total of 130 individuals were interviewed. The interviews were scheduled to serve several purposes: (1) When the information gained in the interviews was compared with the survey data, it served as a check on both methods of data collection. (2) The interviews conducted in the schools offered the subjects a much broader response opportunity than did the survey items, so it was possible for issues to emerge in the interviews that were not revealed by the survey data. This approach also allowed the researchers to develop some general impressions of the schools beyond that covered by the survey data. (3) Students and district office personnel did not complete the survey, so the interview was the only means of obtaining information from them.

The interview information will be reported separately for each of the five groups. The reporting process will vary according to the group. Information gained from the teacher interviews is presented first, followed by data from the students, the principals, and the instructional guides. Finally, the interview information from the district office interviews will be presented.

Teacher Interview Data and Survey Data Compared
Both researchers interviewed teachers in the six schools. When all interviews were completed, the researchers independently reviewed the interviews and arrived at a rating of each school for the 10 categories. The interviewers then came together, discussed their ratings, and arrived at a single rating. The rating assigned was complementary to the five numerical rating options on the survey. This was done first for School 2 as an initial trial of this procedure. In this case, the interviewers used verbal descriptors for the five ratings: Somewhat Below Average, Below Average, Average, Above Average, and Somewhat Above Average. The interviewers concluded that their ratings and the survey ratings were quite similar for 8 of the 10 categories. In one category their rating was somewhat lower than the survey rating, and in another category it was higher than the survey rating. The interviewers then studied these differences, and determined that differences were more

a matter of interpretation of words than real differences in the meaning of the ratings. Having learned from this initial experience, the interviewers decided to do the same thing for each of the remaining five schools, but for those schools actual numerical ratings of 1-5 were assigned to the interview ratings so that the data comparisons could be more precise.

Table 12 shows the mean scores for the five schools for each category. The Interviewer Mean is the score the interviewers assigned to the categories based on the interview data. The Survey Mean is the actual score from the survey. The interviewers arbitrarily decided that if the difference between the interviewer rating and the survey rating was greater than .5, this fact would be noted and considered a rating difference. These differences are indicated in Table 12 by an asterisk. The interviewer and survey ratings were within the .5 range 74 percent of the time. Only one time was the difference as great as 1.00. The greatest number of rating differences was in School 6. In that school, several of the teachers interviewed by one interviewer were very negative in their responses to the interview questions, which led that interviewer to rate the categories quite differently than did the other interviewer and resulted in a combined mean score that was somewhat lower than the survey scores.

Table 12
Comparisons of Mean Scores Based on Interviews With Survey Scores

				School		
Category		5	6	7	15	17
Leadership	Survey mean	3.18	4.02	2.76	2.64	2.82
	Interview mean	4.10	4.00	3.30	2.60	3.20
Instructional Influences	Survey mean	3.35	3.88	2.87	2.85	3.42
	Interview mean	3.40	4.10	2.90	2.40	3.70
Teacher roles	Survey mean	3.78	3.92	3.63	3.68	3.60
	Interview mean	3.70	*3.20	4.10	*3.00	3.60
Teacher attitudes	Survey mean	3.57	4.28	3.23	3.36	3.59
	Interview mean	4.10	4.20	3.70	*2.70	3.80
Vision & expectations	Survey mean	3.32	4.36	2.86	3.19	3.35
	Interview mean	3.60	*3.80	3.00	2.70	3.90
School environment for students	Survey mean	3.31	4.07	3.31	3.03	3.76
	Interview mean	*3.90	3.90	*4.20	*2.20	4.20
Community involvement/support	Survey mean	3.01	3.46	2.72	2.60	3.14
	Interview mean	2.90	3.00	2.70	2.40	*3.80
Organizational arrangements	Survey mean	2.96	4.47	3.04	3.04	3.38
	Interview mean	3.20	*3.20	*3.60	3.00	3.80
External influences	Survey mean	2.85	2.86	2.33	2.44	2.71
	Interview mean	2.60	*2.20	2.40	2.30	2.80
School environment for teachers	Survey mean	3.15	4.07	2.74	2.84	3.20
	Interview mean	*4.00	*3.10	3.00	2.40	3.00

*Asterisks indicate a rating difference of .5 or more.

The data in Table 12 can be interpreted in several ways: (1) It can be claimed that the information gained by interviewing a sample of teachers was generally similar to the data obtained through the survey. (2) Because differences did exist in the data set, especially in School 6, it could be claimed that it is risky to rely on interview sampling alone. We should also emphasize that it is equally risky to rely on survey data when the percentage of returns from a school is low.

Apart from the ratings that were developed from the interviews, the interviewers derived some general overall impressions about the six schools from information obtained not only from the interview comments but also from observations of activities in the schools and the physical plant itself and from informal conversations separate from the interviews. These impressions are presented below. No attempt was made to relate these impressions to the survey data or to the ratings of the interview data.

Impressions from Individual Schools

The interviewers attempted to capture the essence of the information gained in the individual schools, both through the interviews and informally. These summaries are presented below. It must be emphasized that these are the perceptions of the interviewers.

School 2. The small and declining student enrollment is in some ways accompanied by a decline in energy and optimism among the staff. This is the only school among the six where a majority of the interviewees judged their school to be below other middle schools in the district. They attributed this to low TAAS scores, many discipline problems, and lack of community support. The staff reported that most of the students in the school were good kids and that as teachers they are working hard to serve the students. They especially want to raise the TAAS scores. Individual teachers reported some exciting activities going on, but this was not widespread across the school. Academic teams do exist in the school, but apart from the collaboration in these teams, teachers seem to work as individuals without common goals and expectations and without much support from the administration. In short, the school seems adrift. The staff is committed to students and their success, but each in his or her own way and not as a school as a whole.

School 5. A definite feeling prevails that in the last year or so the school has changed and that it is clearly moving toward becoming a better school in all respects. The respondents recognized that the TAAS scores may not be as high as those of other middle schools, but in many respects they felt the scores were as good as those at other schools. This feeling emerged largely from the spirit of cooperation and collaboration in the school and the sense that it is making strides toward becoming an improved school. The principal was given much of the credit for the positive changes in the school. At the same time, the changes had not pleased all teachers, perhaps because of the higher expectations for teachers that resulted. The school building is very old, and respondents expressed concerns about poor facilities, especially for student activities outside the classroom. As in most schools, respondents raised concerns about the lack of parent involvement, though at the same time they were positive about the community around them.

School 6. The staff in School 6 have no doubt but that it is the best middle school in the district in all respects: academic performance, extracurricular activities, and student discipline. They take great pride in the school's long-standing history of strong student discipline. Everyone who works in the school, including custodians and cafeteria workers, accepts responsibility for seeing that students are well disciplined. The discipline standards are evident as students line up to enter the building and as they pass in the hallways between classes. While students do seem to be well disciplined, there is a certain pressure on the teachers to maintain this discipline. (It is interesting to note that in spite of the discipline efforts in the school, on the survey question that asked what changes teachers would like that would make their work more effective and pleasant, 21 percent called for improved discipline). Some of the teachers felt very uncomfortable with the pressure they feel, not only to maintain discipline but also with regard to other expectations. Part of this sense of pressure may result from the lack of much collaboration among the teachers. Since the school operates on a traditional schedule, the staff does not have the academic teams model and thereby misses out on the kind of collaboration that is associated with that arrangement. Grade level groups and content departments do exist, but these do not generate much collaboration among the teachers. In many ways it seems that the school is run by the principal. Teachers have a lot of confidence in the principal and seem generally pleased with his leadership. Many teachers mentioned the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) as the vehicle through which teachers have a voice in the school, but it does not seem that the ILT is a major factor in school decisions. It was reported that teacher turnover in the school is quite low and there is a waiting list of teachers who want to come and teach in the school. Most of the staff expressed real pride in the school and satisfaction with it as a place to work.

School 7. This school gives mixed impressions. Most of the teachers believe it to be the best or one of the best middle schools in SAISD. Yet, a number of teachers expressed concerns about student discipline and about the need for more support and assistance for special-needs students. Teachers feel there is a strong commitment to excellence and student success and that they are expected to give 100 percent or more to support this commitment. In their academic teams the teachers do collaborate very well, but there is not much collaboration outside the teams. Generally the teachers believe they have a voice in what happens in the school, but it is not clear how this is happening. There is an ILT in the school, but it does not seem to meet regularly. Feelings about the school leadership vary greatly. One teacher described the principal as God's gift to teachers, but others felt the principal is not supportive of the teachers, especially around issues of discipline, and that some decisions favored students or parents over teachers.

School 15. The teachers believe that this is a successful school, as measured by TAAS, and an innovative one. It was reported that it is a school to which new programs are often brought for trial. The success of the school seems to come from the hard work of the teachers and scheduling arrangements that provide maximum time for instruction in reading and mathematics, including extra remedial classes. While the school can claim success in academics, however, it is not without problems. The teachers complained of significant discipline problems that really interfere with instruction. They claimed that the community is very diverse and nonsupportive of the school and that students have a great deal of apathy toward school. Additionally, elective classes and extracurricular activities available to students are limited, as is instruction in content areas such as science and social studies. The teachers reported that it is very challenging to teach in this school and that teacher turnover is high. The principal is viewed as being strong in promoting academic excellence but weak in handling the school's serious discipline problems and other issues. The school is quite old, and many of the classes are housed in portable classrooms, conditions that contributed to a number of teacher complaints.

School 17. This school is a multilingual magnet school, which definitely had an influence on the interview information. Almost all of the teachers claimed that the school is tops in the district in terms of student academic achievement, in extracurricular activities, and fewer discipline problems. At the same time, they attributed much of this success to the magnet students. It seems that there are two student bodies in the school: the magnet students, most of whom do not come from the local school community, and the students from the local community, very few of whom are in the magnet program. This school had more positive reports on parent involvement than did the other schools, but most of those came from the magnet parents. The teachers express a lot of pride in the school, and a sense of enjoyment and success in working there. Yet some dissension is evident among the faculty. Some think that the principal plays favorites and others are unhappy with teachers whom they believe are either not working hard or are complaining too much. Students can choose from a wide array of extracurricular activities, and those in the magnet program have a number of elective course choices. There seem to be few formal opportunities for teachers to have a voice in what happens in the school, but they did not complain about this. The teachers do collaborate in their academic teams, but not much outside of these teams. The principal is viewed as rather passive. He spends very little time in classrooms, and he gives teachers the freedom to teach as they think best. New programs that come from the district are passed on to the teachers and they are asked to try them. The interviewers came away with the feeling that this is a good school for teachers and for students; the question is how good it is for students are not in the magnet program. Some of the teachers reported that the school would be very different without the magnet students.

Impressions from Interviews Across the Six Schools

When the researchers considered the interview data from all the schools collectively, a number of impressions emerged, as shown below. The headings used in the discussion came from the data and seemed to the interviewers to capture the essence of the issues being presented. These impressions were informed, in part, by information from the interviews of principals and instructional guides, as well as those of teachers.

Reflections on Teachers

Most teachers work very hard. They often come early and stay late. Many regularly stay as late as 5:30 or 6:00 P.M.

Teachers are dedicated to helping students succeed.

The teachers are generally supportive of each other.

Teachers in schools that have teams appear to enjoy being a part of a team.

Collaboration among teachers is greatest within teams. There is less collaboration among teachers through departments, and even less across grade levels. The one school that did not have teaming reported the least degree of collaboration.

Teachers feel that they have a voice in decisionmaking within their teams. On a school level, some teachers believe that they can make their voice heard through the ILT or by going directly to the principal. Although many teachers suggested that they did not have any real power to make changes in the school, most of them seemed resigned to their degree of involvement in decision-making.

Teachers often used such words as "challenging" and "stressful" to describe what their school environment is like for teachers and students. At the same time, they indicated that their work is made enjoyable by the support of other teachers and by the students, most of whom they characterize as good kids.

They were likely to name teachers as the greatest positive influence on the character of the school.

Reflections on Students

Most of the students are good kids, but the ones who cause disruptions often make teaching difficult.

Many of the students are not motivated to learn.

In two schools, the ILT includes at least one student. Some schools have a student council. One school has a core group of students who make requests and recommendations directly to the principal. Yet, in most schools there is a feeling that students really have very little voice.

Many of the teachers described the school as a "safe haven" for students where they can be fed and can be reasonably sure that they will not be in any physical danger.

Many of the students come from very difficult situations where education is not emphasized.

The extracurricular activities available to students range from very extensive to minimal.

Reflections on Discipline

In every school there was some mention of discipline as an issue. The intensity of the issue varied from very minor to major. In connection with the discipline problem, three solutions were frequently put forth: (1) removal of the students from the school permanently, (2) more consistent enforcement of rules and regulations, and/or (3) stricter and swifter application of discipline.

Reflections on Leadership

In two schools, the principals were viewed positively. In another school, the principal was also viewed positively but not quite as strong as the other two. In a fourth school the principal was viewed negatively as often as positively. In the other two schools, the feelings about the principal might best be described as lukewarm, but in a positive direction.

Teachers' praise of principals most often centered on their strengths as leaders, their willingness to listen to teachers who have problems, and their caring attitudes toward teachers and students.

Teachers' complaints about principals most often centered on issues related to discipline, their unwillingness to confront difficult issues, or their lack of support of teachers.

Reflections on Instruction

Clearly, TAAS is the driving force for instruction in the schools.

Teachers rarely talked about instruction in their classrooms, and if they did, it was usually without enthusiasm.

Teachers need more help in working with students with special needs, those who are in special education, and those who are functioning significantly below grade level.

The need for smaller classes was often mentioned as a means of improving instruction.

The respondents seldom mentioned the curriculum. When they did, it was usually to say that the curriculum was too restrictive in its time allocations for teaching certain things.

The respondents also reported frequently that many of the students enter middle schools functioning much below grade level, thus creating a difficult challenge for middle school teachers.

Every school reported a tutoring program that operated after school. In some schools, it was required of students and in others it was voluntary. Teachers provided the tutoring, and some of them were paid extra.

Reflections on Organization/Scheduling

All schools except one use teaming and block scheduling; the exception operates on a traditional schedule of every class every day. Teaming seems to be well accepted. Regarding block scheduling, few complaints were expressed, but some do wish for daily meeting of classes. Some teachers in the school with the traditional schedule are not pleased with it.

Overall, teachers are generally satisfied with the organization of the school day.

Reflections on Community Involvement and Support

While some schools reported more community support than others, every school reported that parent involvement is very limited and inadequate.

Some schools offer occasional events or activities to attract parents, but there seem to be no long-term or in-depth plans for increasing community involvement and support.

General Comments
In all of the schools but one, teachers and administrators claimed that their school is the best in the district or as good as the other middle schools.

Personnel in all schools claimed their school serves the most difficult community in the district.

Student Interviews

The information from interviews with students, while informative, should be viewed with caution. The schools were asked to arrange for interviews with students from all three grade levels, and students who would be representative of the entire population of the school, not just the better students. The students who were interviewed represented all grade levels, but they did seem to be those who have some type of leadership role or are viewed as being responsible students. It seems reasonable to assume that the responses from these students do not represent the opinions of the student body as a whole and that they are skewed toward positive opinions.

Following is a summary of the interview comments with the students in the six schools where interviews were conducted. Shown first is the interview question followed by a summary of the responses for each of the six schools. From school to school the responses to individual questions varied from rather brief to more elaborate, and the summaries reflect this. Sometimes the responses were tangential and did not exactly address the question, but time did not always permit reconsideration of the question.

Do you like coming to school here?
School 2. It's okay.

School 5. The students were rather emphatic in their "yes" answer. They like the school and like coming to school.

School 6. Yes! Many students do not want to leave, they love it. It is like a family.

School 7. Yes! I like the choice of electives like Spanish, art, etc. You're getting an education, but it is fun.

School 15. It is pretty good to come to school here. Sometimes it is hard to get up in the morning.

School 17. A definite "yes." Every day there are new challenges. You learn something new. It is different from other schools because you can take advanced classes.

Is this a good school?
School 2. It's all right.

School 5. Yes, the students think it is a good school. They have a lot of activities such as sports and science fairs and other extracurricular activities. If your behavior is good, you can get special privileges. They named a lock-in that was very popular. They can serve as office assistant if their behavior is good

School 6. All said "yes' for the same reasons as above.

School 7. For those who want to learn it is. Every school is good in its own way. Every school had its bad people.

School 15. It is better than some schools and about the same as some others. It has gotten better; there is less fighting. Student behavior has improved. Teachers are more tolerant and understanding.

School 17. The answer was "yes" from all students.

If someone were to ask you what this school is like, what would you tell them?
School 2. Students at other schools think this is a place where there is not much discipline.

School 5. This is the cleanest school; we don't have any graffiti. Teachers make learning fun.

School 6. Great programs. Students are proud of this school. We try to be number 1 in everything. A lot of our families came to school here. You get help with problems from teachers and counselors. We have the best students. It is safe and comfortable. We have good teachers.

School 7. Everybody knows everybody. It's interesting. The activities are interesting. I'm learning a new language.

School 15. It is an old school, but it is still a good school. We have some good teachers. It's nice.

School 17. It is a bit difficult, but very interesting. Teachers are caring and very helpful. Students here are better than at other schools. We have great opportunities for classes and other activities.

What is the best thing about this school?
School 2. Mentioned were students, teachers, the coaches, and the staff. One student said nothing was good about the school.

School 5. The principal is the best, he really believes in each student. We have a lot of friends here. We have a good band program and a mariachi group and art and computers and sports. There are some gangs and cliques that try to ruin it for good students, and some students have bad attitudes.

School 6. Very clean, very organized. You get to be involved in a lot of activities after school and some on weekends.

School 7. Everybody trying to help each other, having fun. Everything. Being with friends. Academic curriculum. You know that it is preparing you for high school.

School 15. The things we do in science, such as all the science experiences. Reading and math are pretty good. You have some electives such as art and PE. The honors program. The activities and field trips. One student said the best thing was leaving the school next year.

School 17. Teachers are good; they always help you when you need help. Always something good going on.

What is the worst thing about your school?
School 2. The alternative center (In School Suspension). The rocks on the outdoor basketball court. The gym floor. Some teachers. Not enough money.

School 5. Our building is too small. We need a bigger cafeteria, another gym, and a football field. They need to change the dress code. We need better food in the cafeteria.

School 6. Nothing, we don't want to change anything.

School 7. Bad kids, fights, cursing. People being lazy. Some teachers are mean to you. The vice-principal, his attitude is that every kid is a criminal. Uniforms.

School 15. Our classrooms have paint falling off and they are falling apart. Our rest rooms are always dirty. We don't have enough paper to do our work in class. Teachers need more offices so they have a place to work. The principal is too strict. Discipline in class, fights. Students who do not want to learn.

School 17. Sometimes it is too hard. Languages are overwhelming. We have eight classes and to get everything done is difficult, especially if you are in sports. Getting along with some of the kids.

Do you think kids in this school often get into trouble?
School 2. No, not really. There are a lot of violations of the dress code.

School 5. Before last year there were many fights, but now it is much better. This is a safe place to come to school.

School 6. Not really. We have a few problems, but not many.

School 7. Yes, but just the people who are like that.

School 15. Some do, but not so many. A lot go to juvenile or get suspended.

School 17. Mostly around the dress code and talking back. Hardly any fights. It is a safe school, better than other schools.

To make this a better school for you, what changes do you think could or should be made?
School 2. Our environment, the surroundings.

School 5. We want more parent volunteers and more parent involvement. We need more computers and printers and better athletic facilities. Other schools have these better than we do. "Other schools try to put us down as dumb Mexicans, but Hispanics want to learn."

School 6. They didn't really have any suggestions.

School 7. Helping lazy or bad kids. Take them and put them in a room and talk to them about why they should be good. Add a drama team and dance.

School 15. A better/newer school with better classrooms. We need more electives. Make teachers not really strict but where they can control the classroom. Less students, there are up to 35 in a class. Change some teachers. Change the dress code.

School 17. Start later in the day. Cafeteria food. Make lectures shorter and give more time in class to work on class work.

Who do you think is most responsible for what this school is like?
School 2. The vice-principal, not a lot of people really like her. She is real strict and gives us bad looks.

School 5. The principal, the students, the teachers, and the parents, in that order.

School 6. It has to be everybody.

School 7. The assistant principal, he is handling things. He is a strong leader.

School 15. The teachers and the principal. The principal walks around the building a lot. The vice-principal, he handles discipline. The principal is not as strict.

School 17. Everybody works together, the PTA and a lot of committees. Teachers and administration have a lot to do with it. Student attitudes.

In this school, are students respected by teachers and administrators?
School 2. Some do, some don't. They want us to respect them, but they don't respect us.

School 5. Yes, the teachers and the administrators respect us. They treat you the way you treat them.

School 6. Yes.

School 7. Yes, sometimes, mainly the good kids. Some of the teachers are immature.

School 15. Most of the teachers respect us, but some do not. Not that much. They ask for respect, but they treat us like little kids. They yell at us.

School 17. Definitely yes.

Are students given an opportunity to say what they would like to have happen in the school?
School 2. Some teachers do.

School 5. We have our own newspaper. Teachers will listen to students, but we would like a greater opportunity to have a voice in the school.

School 6. We get to make some choices. People will listen to our opinions.

School 7. They listen to you, but they do not always act on what we ask for.

School 15. Not really. We don't get asked. We would like to have more say.

School 17. Students get to express their opinion through the school newspaper. You can join a club and have a say-so through that. They feel they are listened to.

Is what teachers expect of students too hard or too easy or just about right?
School 2. About right. A little of both.

School 5. It is just about right. We have to study, but it is not too hard, it makes us think.

School 6. It is just about right.

School 7. It's about right. But some kids think it is too hard. It varies from teacher to teacher. It is easy.

School 15. Several students replied that it was too hard, and several others thought it was about right. None thought the expectations were too easy. Social studies is the hardest class. Some of the language/reading classes are boring.

School 17. Sometimes too much homework from all teachers at the same time. It varies from too hard to too easy.

If students are having trouble with their schoolwork, can they easily get extra help from teachers?
School 2. Yes, you can stay after school or come in before school.

School 5. We have tutoring after school. We have a new tutoring program and if a student fails the TAAS courses they must go to this. Teachers will let you make up work during their 45-minute advisory period.

School 6. Tutoring is done after school by teachers and if you are told to go you must.

School 7. Sometimes.

School 15. We have tutoring after school and before school several days each week. The student teachers from Trinity University also give extra help.

School 17. Yes, tutoring is available after school.

Do your teachers spend much time in class preparing you to take the TAAS test?
School 2. Yes.

School 5. Yes , but it is not too much time.

School 6. Almost every day we spend some time getting ready. We need a lot of practice, so it is okay.

School 7. Yes, we do.

School 15. Every day we work on TAAS. It is okay because it helps us learn what we need to know, but it is kind of boring.

School 17. We take a lot of time getting ready for it. They make too big a deal out of it. We spend too much time on TAAS, we need to spend more time on other subjects, not just reading and math.

Do you think parents have much influence on what happens in this school? Explain.
School 2. Not really, there is a PTA, but that is all.

School 5. Many parents come to the school and they can express their opinion. They have a PTA and parents have a voice through this.

School 6. They help sell things at events. Once a month some come with their student to math/science night. We have a PTA.

School 7. No.

School 15. We don't have any parent volunteers. Sometimes parents will come to visit. When we have some kind of performance, a lot of parents come. Parents don't have any influence.

School 17. The PTA sponsors activities and raises money.

Do you have a lot of extracurricular activities such as clubs, band, sports, that you can participate in? Do many students participate in these types of activities?

School 2. Not very many.

School 5. We have sports, band, mariachi, chess, spelling bees, UIL science, math, and calculator. Also, we have high school credit courses in biology, speech, and algebra. We do not have theater or orchestra.

School 6. We have a whole lot of things to choose from [and they named a list of them]. A lot of students are in these activities.

School 7. We have track, tennis, baseball, volleyball, mariachi, Spanish, and student assistants.

School 15. We need more. We have sports and band. We have no student council. We think quite a few students participate in these.

School 17. A long list of activities was named. We have lots of things we can do and many students participate.

The responses of the students tend to match the responses on the survey and the school interview information from the six schools. Schools 6 and 17 are viewed most positively by their students. (It should be noted that the students interviewed in School 17 were in the magnet program). Also, many of the comments in these two schools had a focus on academics and opportunities for students. Student responses in School 5 were also positive, but with less emphasis on academics and more on poor facilities. Students in Schools 7 and 15 tended to be somewhat neutral or guarded in their comments and even a bit negative about some teachers. Students in School 15 were less positive than those in School 7. Comments from students in School 2 tended to be either passive or unenthusiastic or negative. These students saw very little really positive about their school.

Principal Interviews

Some impressions drawn from these interviews will be presented first, followed by a sample of responses related to that impression.

Every principal described his school in positive terms, but the nature of the terms used varied, as reflected in some of the responses:

- An excellent school, one of the finest in the district and the state.
- Closet thing to a private school in a public school district.
- Very nurturing school.
- I will match our students with those any place in the country.
- This is a wonderful school that other schools in district would like to be like.

The principals varied quite a bit in their descriptions of their role in the school. Some seemed to describe it as that of a director or a task master.

- My greatest task is to see that teachers are planning and working together and that the curriculum is being followed.
- My greatest challenge is to get this school into a position where it is manageable and to change the attitudes of teachers and their treatment of students.
- My greatest challenge every day is enforcing rules. Everybody in the school needs to be on the same page. I am responsible for anything that happens in the school.

Others see their role as that of a collaborator.

- My role is to work with teachers and parents and others as a change agent to bring about change in the school.

Other principals believe they should model what is expected.
- I must value everyone in this school, and I must do this by modeling it through my words and my actions.

The changes the principals would make in their school tended to focus on other persons or groups or on the school. All of the changes could be associated with a desire to improve the school, and perhaps in an indirect way, with instructional leadership, but there was no mention of changes in their own behavior or practices.

- I would change the attitudes of teachers so that they would have high expectations for students.
- I would cause parents to value education for their students.
- I would reduce student-teacher ratios.
- I would reduce the population in the school by 50 percent and connect K-12 education.
- My desire would be to change the attitudes of the teachers so that they would believe that students can do well.
- Parents need to change their attitude and become more involved in the school and more supportive.
- I would add more hours to the day. The things on my platter are just overwhelming.

The one issue on which the principals were all in agreement was teachers' voice in the school. All of them reported that teachers definitely had a voice in what happened within the school either through the ILT or the teams, or the departments, or directly with the principal. This specific question did not appear on the survey, but when teachers were asked this question in the interviews most of them reported that they did have a voice, a response that put them in agreement with the principals.

When asked about a common vision for the school, all the principals said there is one for their school or they are working to establish the vision with all teachers. Although it was expressed in different terms, it always focused on student success. An interesting observation about the responses to this question was that the principals said very little about future plans or actions designed or intended to move the school beyond where it currently is except for improving TAAS scores. Rather than a vision for the school, the principals seem to be expressing a current goal or purpose for the school.

In response to the question about high expectations for teachers and students, four of the principals reported that they have high expectations for both groups, while two of the principals reported they have high expectations but many of their teachers are not conveying high expectations to their students.

A number of the principals, (not in response to a specific question) requested more teachers. They claimed they are having to use Title I funds or Obey-Porter funds to pay teachers in order to provide the additional staffing they needed.

In reflecting on the principal comments, several conclusions seem justified: (1) All of the principals seem to feel good about their performance as a principal. The evidence for this conclusion was not only in what they said but in what they did not say. None of them said anything about what they plan to do differently in the future in their role and actions. (2) The principals of Schools 6, 7, and 17 feel very good about their schools and where they are. The principal of School 15 views his school as being very good, but with some improvements needed. The principal of School 5 is aware that improvements need to be made, but thinks that major strides have been made in the past two years, and he is excited and enthusiastic about the future of the school. The principal of School 2 recognizes that there are problems in the school and would like for that to change, but does not appear to be very optimistic about that happening. (3) With the possible exception of School 6, the teachers tend to view the schools less positively than the principals on most of the issues explored in the interviews. In most cases it would seem to be a matter of degree of difference rather than being on opposite ends of the spectrum. It is likely that the greatest differences are in the categories of school leadership and school environment for teachers, where the teachers were less positive than the principals.

Instructional Guide Interviews

One school did not have an IG at the time of the interviews, so only five were interviewed. After careful review it was apparent that little information in those interviews covered issues that had not been addressed in the other school interviews. The one place where the IGs did differ was in their emphasis on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), an instrument that was not mentioned by principals and only rarely by teachers. Some of the IGs expressed concern about getting the TEKS incorporated into the curriculum. Other than this one matter, this group responded to the interview in much the same manner as did the teachers in their schools— more like the teachers than the principals.

In addition to the regular interview questions, the researchers asked the IGs what recommendations they would make to district office personnel. Listed below are the recommendations they offered.

- We need more master teachers in all schools and subjects in place of some of the existing teachers who are not effective.
- We need a lot more teachers for special education.
- We need more money for computers, and we need to have swift repair on the computers we have.
- Select good administrators for all schools.
- Stay out of the way and let schools do their best. Step in only when necessary.
- Staff development needs to be improved. Some of it was poor.
- Trainer-of-trainers model is not working well. Much of what the trainers learn is lacking in relation to content.
- District folks should spend more time on campuses and give people praise for their accomplishments.
- Middle schools need more staffing, and they need to be able to offer more electives.

District Office Interviews

The questions asked in the interview are presented first followed by the cumulative answers of the respondents.

1. Would you begin by giving me your perceptions of the quality, however you might define it, of the SAISD middle schools as a group?
There was a common feeling that in the past few years the schools have made much progress, with two exceptions, and that generally they are moving forward and getting better. There was also common agreement that they have a ways to go to be comparable to middle schools in other districts. There was some feeling that the schools are doing better in math and science and social studies than in literacy areas, but there was not total agreement about this. Teachers are getting more professional development, and that has helped. The schools have more and better curriculum than they did a few years ago, but curriculum is still lacking and more resources are needed.

2. What are the factors that most influence or affect what middle schools are like?
The responses to this inquiry showed some variation. Named most often was the quality of the leadership in the schools. Teachers were named second as an influencing factor. There was some feeling that there is not an abundance of teachers who are qualified or who desire to teach in middle schools, and this is a negative factor. Positive factors that were mentioned were a strengthened accountability system, more and better professional development, and the addition of instructional guides to the schools.

3. Thinking of the 17 middle schools as they are today, which ones would you rate as the best in the district, which ones are most in need of improvement, and which ones fall in the middle?
There was agreement that Schools 4 and 13 were most in need of improvement. For the top schools, Schools 6, 7, and 15 were frequently mentioned, but not by everyone. Schools 3 and 17 were also often mentioned, but with the additional comment that they had the advantage of being magnet schools. The other 10 schools were consistently ranked in the middle of the 17.

4. When you consider the top schools, what would you say are the key factors that contribute to the quality of the school?
Effective principal leadership was voiced as the first and most important factor. Effective leaders were described as ones who will confront teachers to get quality instruction, who develop an efficient organizational structure that works as an organization rather than as individuals, who engender a commitment to helping all students be successful, and who have a vision and organize to accomplish it. Student-centered learning was also mentioned as key to the top schools, but it was stated that this required a principal who builds relationships. The better schools also use data to drive the decisions they make regarding instruction.

5. When you consider the schools you ranked as having lower quality, what would you say are the key factors that influence those schools?
The absence of the factors mentioned in #4 was the frequent answer. The respondents also stated that the schools of lower quality did not have schoolwide focus on students and on quality and that they were often disrupted by student discipline. Also, these schools did not use data effectively to guide their programs.

6. When you think of the next 1-3 years, do you feel the rankings of the schools as you have given them will change or remain the same?
There was a range of opinions in response to this question. The one most often given was that without a change in leadership those schools most in need of improving probably will not change much. Five schools were named at least once as having a probability of making progress. These were Schools 7, 8, 11, 12, and 15.

7. To what extent do you think the middle schools are influenced by the district office?
Five of the six respondents indicated that the influence is considerable or great, while one indicated the influence is minimal. One said the influence is great but not always positive. On the positive side, they believe that in recent years district office initiatives have really put a focus on the middle schools and their importance and that this focus has caused the schools to become much more focused on students and their needs. This initiative led principals to be more attentive to data and more accountable for what is happening in their schools. Along with this emphasis on the middle schools comes more resources, better curriculum, and more and better staff development. The negative influence that was mentioned was the district's forcing the schools into the New American Schools designs. This was just too much change with what was already happening and it was counterproductive. The one person who believes the influence of the district office is minimal feels this way because not much has been done to build a team and teamwork with the school principals.

8. What do you think is most needed to make middle schools, all of them, even better than they are?
This question generated a range of responses:

- Focus on literacy and math.
- Develop programs for students with problems in reading.
- More professional development for teachers and principals.
- Schools need more time to implement the changes that have been introduced.
- Need stability in school leadership. Some schools have had multiple principals in recent years.
- They need to think out of the box, do more than TAAS.
- Need to bring principals together and keep them thinking of goals for all middle schools and working toward them.
- District office needs to listen to the people in the schools and to respond to their needs.
- District office needs to push schools to identify parameters and benchmarks and then to design ways to accomplish them.

9. What else could you tell me that will help us better understand SAISD middle schools?

- District needs to rethink policies and procedures for staffing middle schools. Identify teachers who want to be in a school and put less emphasis on ethnicity, especially in schools where there is high turnover. Also, principals should be allowed to handpick teachers.
- Student populations across the schools do not vary much, but there are a couple of schools that seem to lose more of their better students to the magnet schools than do other schools.
- The schools are now driven by TAAS, and they need to get beyond that to teaching for more advanced skills.
- Lack of parent involvement hurts our middle schools.
- At least two of the schools, 6 and 17, take their available money and allocate it according to the particular needs of the school. More of the schools should do that.

What Has Been Learned About the Middle Schools

The findings from this study will be presented in four ways. First will be the findings as they are associated with each school. Second, these findings will be related to the academic performance of the school. As this is done, the six factors identified in the initial proposal to be investigated in this study will also be explored. Finally, the findings for the schools collectively will be related to factors in the professional literature that address successful schools, especially middle schools.

Findings for Individual Schools

The school findings are based primarily on the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey, for this is the only data source for all 17 schools. Additional information will be added from the interviews in those schools where interviews were conducted: Schools 2, 5, 6, 7, 15, and 17. Several of the survey items were rated consistently across the schools, so they will not be mentioned for each school. The items that asked about the availability of extra academic assistance for students and the influence of TAAS on instruction were both rated above 3.00 by all schools. In the six schools where interviews were conducted, tutoring before and/or after school was available to students. In some schools it was mandatory for students identified as needing it, and in other schools it was voluntary. The item that asked how well the actions of the district office served the needs of the school was rated below 3.00 in all schools except one. The school environment for students was rated above 3.00 by all except two schools. With two exceptions, the schools rated the support and involvement of parents below 3.00. The school environment for students was rated higher than the environment for teachers in all but two schools. All schools except one identified teachers as the greatest strength of the school. Those schools that were exceptions in the ratings of an item will be identified.

The findings presented below are based on several data sets: (1) findings related to a specific survey item, from Tables 4 and 7, (2) the category ratings that are in Table 10, (3) findings about organizational arrangements from survey item 6 that are shown in Table 7, and (4) strengths and weaknesses and problem areas that come from the data in Tables 8-11. When it is relevant, information from the school interviews will be included for those schools where interviews were conducted.

School 1. The return rate of surveys for this school was only 26 percent so the data cannot be assumed to be representative of all the staff. The ratings of leadership were among the highest of all schools. It was the only one of the schools in which teachers were not rated as the greatest strength of the school. Forty-five percent of the respondents rated administration/leadership as the greatest strength. (Teachers were rated as the second greatest strength.) The ratings in most categories for this school were between 3.00 and 4.00. Discipline and concerns about parent involvement and support were the two areas where the need for change was mentioned most often. There were some concerns about organization and scheduling, but it was not clear exactly what concerned the staff. The responses to item 6 on the survey indicated the school has block scheduling and was organized by grade levels. One-half of the respondents reported that they were engaged in academic teaming, which raises a question about the status of academic teaming in the school.

School 2. On two key categories, leadership and school environment for teachers, the ratings in this school were below 3.00. Administration/leadership and discipline were seen as the two greatest weaknesses in the school, with concerns about parents and students who do not value learning also mentioned. Teachers reported that they were the greatest strength in the school and that the 90-minute blocks were the second greatest strength. This was one of the five schools where the rating of teacher freedom in designing instruction was below 3.00. Changes the respondents would like to see made in the school would be smaller classes, better discipline, and better administration/leadership. Apparently the school was engaged in academic teaming and block scheduling and it was organized by grade levels and subject areas. The interview data revealed that the number of extracurricular activities in the school was minimal. Several of the teachers in the school reported very exciting activities in their classrooms, but most of them seemed to lack enthusiasm and optimism about the school. They reported a desire and commitment for students to perform better on the TAAS, but there did not seem to be much confidence that they would do better because of the poor community environment from which they came.

School 3. One-half of the ratings in this school were above 3.00 and one-half below. The highest ratings were for the categories of teacher roles and school environment for students. Some of the low-rated categories were leadership, vision and expectations, and school environment for teachers. Better discipline and administration/leadership were identified as the two changes most desired for the school. After teachers, the multilingual program was seen as a strength of the school. The responses to item 6 suggest that the school is organized by subject areas and grade levels but does not have block scheduling or academic teaming.

School 4. Ten of the 12 category ratings for this school were below 3.00, ratings that suggest this is a school with multiple problems. The two categories rated above 3.00 were emphasis on the TAAS and the role of the teachers. Teachers were named as the greatest strength of the school by 61 percent of the respondents. Two of the lowest category ratings were 2.36 for leadership and 2.33 for the environment for teachers. The greatest weaknesses in the school were discipline, the administration/leadership, and teacher attitudes. The changes that were desired for the school were better discipline, smaller classes, and better administration/leadership. The responses to item 6 were not completely clear, but it would seem that the school has block scheduling and academic teaming and is organized by subject areas and grade levels. Interestingly, the school had the lowest rating of all the schools for emphasis on the TAAS (3.54). It is not known whether the school actually does place less emphasis on the TAAS than other schools or whether this response reflects the tendency in this school to rate everything low.

School 5. Most of the category ratings from this school were between 3.00 and 3.75. After the TAAS rating, the highest ratings were for teacher roles and teacher attitudes. Other than community involvement and support and external influences, which were rated low by most of the schools, the only rating below 3.00 was for organization and scheduling. The data did not offer any explanation of this rating. As did many of the schools, this school had block scheduling and academic teaming and was organized by subjects and grade levels. Teachers were viewed as being the greatest strength of the school, and discipline and parental concerns were the greatest problem areas. Changes called for in the school were better discipline, more support for instruction in general and for special education, and greater parent involvement and support. The interviews revealed that a new principal had been assigned to the school within the past two years and had brought about many changes, changes that were viewed as being positive by most but not all teachers. The school environment for teachers was rated as 3.15, the sixth highest among the schools. It was one of the seven schools where leadership was rated above 3.00 (3.18).

School 6. Overall, this school had the highest category ratings of any school, with 7 of the 12 ratings above 4.00. Parent involvement and support and external influences were rated below 3.00, but all other ratings were near or above 4.00. Leadership, vision and expectations and the environment for teachers were all rated above 4.00. This school was one of the two for which the environment for teachers was not rated lower than the environment for students. Both were rated equally (4.07). The greatest strength of the school was the teachers, followed closely by administration/leadership and discipline. However, improved discipline was what the respondents most wanted to develop to make life in the school better for teachers and students. Regarding administration/leadership, 24 percent listed it as the greatest strength of the school and 12 percent listed it as the greatest weakness. The two greatest weaknesses in the school were lack of communication and collaboration and lack of parental involvement and support. This school operates on a traditional schedule and is organized primarily around subject areas, and this seemed to contribute to a lack of communication and collaboration within the school. From the interviews it was apparent that there is great pride in the school among most of the staff, as well as the students. In their minds theirs is the very best school in the district in academics, discipline, and extracurricular activities. They are especially proud of the level of discipline in the school. As already mentioned, some of the staff expressed a desire for even better discipline. The school has an extensive array of extracurricular activities for the students and many students take advantage of those activities. A mandatory tutorial program is conducted after school for students who need extra help.

School 7. The category scores for this school were equally divided, with one-half below 3.00 and one-half above. After the high rating for TAAS emphasis, the highest ratings were for teacher roles, the school environment for students, and teacher attitudes. Also rated above 3.00 were the school's efforts to involve parents, and organizational arrangements. Leadership, instructional influences, vision and expectations, and the school environment for teachers were rated below 3.00. The teachers and the administration/leadership were identified as the greatest strengths of the school, while discipline and parental concerns were the greatest weaknesses. Changes that are desired for the school are better discipline, more support for students with special needs, and a change in organization and scheduling. The school employs academic teaming, but not block scheduling. It is organized by subject areas and grade levels.

In the interviews conducted in this school, much pride in the school was expressed, but a wide range of feelings about the school was expressed. Many felt the school is the best, or one of the best in the district, while others emphasized the discipline problems in the school and the need for support for special education. Inclusion was not at all popular. The school leadership was generally viewed as being very caring and quite open to the thoughts of the staff, yet some feel that the decisions made tend to favor students and parents over teachers. Some believe the students in the school are great, while others tend to focus on student problems.

School 8. Survey respondents reported that the greatest strength of the school is the teachers, with teaming/collaboration and discipline also noted as strengths. Lack of parental involvement and support and lack of cohesiveness and communication are viewed as the greatest weaknesses in the school. The respondents called for a number of changes: Greater support for students with special needs, less paperwork, better communication, smaller classes, more parent support, and changes in organization and scheduling. The school employs academic teaming and block scheduling along with subject-area and grade-level organization. Under the category ratings, leadership was rated at 3.92, the second highest rating among the schools. Ratings of teacher roles, teacher attitudes, and vision and expectations were almost identical with the rating of leadership. Most of the ratings of the other categories were also above 3.00. The only categories rated below 3.00 were external influences and the involvement of parents.

School 9. This was the only school where all of the 10 categories were rated above 3.00 (see Table 6). It was the only school that rated parent support and involvement and external influences above 3.00. The TAAS item was rated above 4.00, and the other category scores ranged from 3.02 for parent support to 3.98 for vision and expectations. Out of the 28 survey items with ratings, only 2 were rated below 3.00. Teachers viewed themselves as the greatest strength in the school, with administration/leadership the second greatest strength. Lack of parental support and involvement and students who are negative and not motivated to learn were the greatest weaknesses. The changes the respondents would like for the school are more support for special education, better technology, more parent involvement and support, less paperwork, better discipline, and better resources and facilities. Responses to item 6 about the organization of the school were not clear. Most respondents reported they have block scheduling and were organized by subject areas. A few reported academic teaming and organization by grade levels. It is unknown whether these latter two arrangements exist for some of the staff but not all, or whether there was a misinterpretation of this item.

School 10. There were more category ratings below 3.00 than above 3.00 for this school. Teacher roles and attitudes received the highest ratings, after the TAAS emphasis. Among the lower-rated categories were vision and expectations, external influences, school environment for teachers, and leadership. By a large percentage (82 percent) the teachers reported that they are the greatest strength in the school. Lack of parent support and involvement and student apathy are seen as the greatest weaknesses. The changes the teachers would like to see are more ways to motivate and support students, more instructional support, less paperwork, better discipline, and better resources and facilities. Organizationally, the school has academic teaming and block scheduling, along with organization by grade levels. A few individuals reported they are organized by subject area, but most did not report this arrangement.

School 11. The return rate for this school was 34 percent, which suggests caution in applying these findings to the school as a whole. For the most part, the responses in this school were positive. Only two of the category scores were below 3.00, external influences and involvement and support of parents. The other ratings, TAAS excepted, ranged from 3.03 for instructional influences to 3.50 for teacher roles. Leadership was rated at 3.18, vision and expectations at 3.31, and the environment for teachers at 3.10. Teachers were viewed as the greatest strength in the school, followed by the administration/leadership. However, a greater percentage of respondents reported administration/leadership as a weakness of the school (36 percent) than as a strength (23 percent). Apparently perceptions about the administration/leadership are divided. Discipline was the second greatest weakness of the school. Better discipline was the change most desired for the school followed by improved relationships among the staff. School 11 is organized by grade levels and subject areas and employs academic teaming and block scheduling.

School 12. The survey responses from this school were mixed, with slightly more being below 3.00 than above 3.00. Other than the TAAS item, the highest category rating was for teacher roles, with the next highest being school environment for students. Yet, the environment for teachers was rated quite low (2.39). Also rated below 2.50 were the categories of leadership, community involvement and support, and organizational arrangements. Most respondents reported their school engages in academic teaming and block scheduling, and a few indicated they are organized by subject areas and grade levels. It was not clear whether the latter two arrangements are schoolwide. The majority of the respondents reported that teachers are the greatest strength of the school, and teacher attitudes and administration/leadership are the greatest weaknesses in the school. This school is one of four in which the category of teacher attitudes was rated below 3.00. Four frequently mentioned changes for the school were : better administration/leadership, more opportunities and support for students, improved relationships among the staff, and better discipline.

School 13. When considering the survey results for this school it should be noted that the return rate was 29 percent. The majority of the category ratings for this school were below 3.00. Teacher roles, organizational arrangements, and TAAS emphasis were rated above 3.00, and the rest below that level. Especially low (below 2.50) were the ratings for school environment for teachers, community involvement and support, instructional influences, external influences, teacher attitudes, and leadership. Teachers are viewed as the greatest strength of the school and the administration/leadership as the greatest weakness, with discipline mentioned as a weakness also. A number of changes were suggested to improve the situation in the school: more professionalism, better discipline, better administration/leadership, more support from parents, and more attention to instruction and instructional support. The school appears to be organized by subject and grade level and to have academic teaming. Several individuals indicated they have block scheduling, but most did not so indicate.

School 14. In this school, only two categories were rated below 3.00— community involvement and support, and external influences. Most of the ratings were between 3.50 and 4.00. The highest ratings were for the school's efforts to promote community involvement and support, and organizational arrangements. The school has academic teaming but no block scheduling. It is organized around subject areas and grade levels. Leadership was rated 3.44, a rating very similar to the scores for instructional influences, teacher roles, teacher attitudes, and vision and expectations. Strengths of the school were reported to be teachers, administration/leadership, and teaming/collaboration. Forty-six percent of the respondents indicated that discipline is the greatest weakness of the school. Lack of facilities and resources was also mentioned as a weakness. Changes desired for the school are better discipline, better facilities, and smaller classes.

School 15. The findings for this school are interesting because of the range of scores for the various categories. Teacher roles was the category given the highest rating, TAAS excepted, at 3.68, while external influences were rated at 2.44, leadership at 2.64, and school environment for teachers at 2.84. This score range was explained, at least in part, by the information from the interviews. Most of the staff interviewed rated the school as the best or one of the best in the district, some even said the state, but they also spoke of what they considered to be serious discipline problems in the school. Teachers attribute the success of the school to their hard work and dedication, but this they did under stressful conditions because of discipline problems and what they perceived to be the lack of administrative support relative to these problems. Sixty-four percent of the teachers feel that teachers are the greatest strength of the school, a finding reinforced in the interviews. Teaming/collaboration was also mentioned as a strength. Discipline was named by 44 percent of the respondents as the greatest weakness of the school. Inadequate administration/leadership was also reported as a weakness. As might have been anticipated, better discipline is the change most desired in the school. Other changes mentioned were more support for special education, more opportunities and support for students, better administration/leadership, and smaller classes. Some of the students complained during their interviews that the classes were too large, up to 35 per class.

The school is housed in one of the oldest buildings in the district plus many portable classrooms, so it was a bit surprising that facilities did not emerge as a major concern among the staff. Academic teaming and block scheduling are in place in the school as well as organization by grade levels. Some indicated that the school is organized by subject areas, but this group represents less than one-third of the respondents. How much organization there is by subject areas is not clear from the surveys or from the interviews.

School 16. Other than the TAAS score, there were only two category ratings above 3.00 for the school. Teacher roles was rated at 3.10 and the school's efforts to involve the community at 3.28. The rest of the scores ranged from 2.05 for community involvement and support to 2.96 for the school environment for students. The environment for teachers was rated at 2.20. It was one of four schools where the category of teacher attitudes was rated below 3.00. Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported teachers as the greatest strength of the school. Discipline was the greatest weakness. Changes suggested for the school were improved discipline and improved administration/leadership. The school does not employ block scheduling, but it has academic teaming, and it is organized by grade level and subject.

School 17. With only two exceptions, all the category ratings for this school were above 3.00. Those below this level were leadership (2.86) and external influences (2.71). Except for the TAAS rating, those ratings above 3.00 were rather consistent, ranging from 3.12 to 3.76. This was one of four schools that rated emphasis on the TAAS below 4.00. It also had the highest score of all schools for community involvement and support. Information gained from interviews in this school supported some of these survey findings, but not in all cases. This is a multilingual magnet school that draws students who have the interest and motivation to participate in this type of program. It also serves students who are not in the magnet program. Because of the quality of the magnet students, the teachers seem to feel they need to place less emphasis on TAAS than other schools. Also, it was reported that the parents of the magnet students were quite involved and supportive, which accounts for the positive rating in this category. A low rating in the category for the external influences was not surprising. The staff in this school would like more freedom and flexibility in the decisions they make. The rating of leadership below 3.00 was lower than might have been expected from the interviews. For the most part the teachers did not express any great praise or complaint about the school leadership; they seem satisfied with it. All those interviewed claimed the school is the best, or near the top, in the district and they seem pleased to be teaching there. They reported a long list of extracurricular activities available to students, as well as a variety of advanced courses and community involvement activities. At the same time, the respondents acknowledged that without the magnet program the school would probably be quite different.

Teachers were reported as the greatest strength of the school, with the multilingual program being a distant second. Administration/leadership, discipline, and teacher attitudes, in that order, were reported as the greatest weaknesses. Changes desired for the school are improved staff relationships, improved discipline, more support for special education, better administration/leadership, and more opportunities and support for students. In terms of organization, the school is organized by grade level and by subject area, and it uses academic teaming and block scheduling.

Relating Academic Performance of Schools with Study Data

A major purpose of this study was to identify those factors within middle schools that related to the academic performance of the schools. In Texas, the TAAS tests are the measure of the academic performance of schools. This is especially true for elementary and middle schools. In high schools scores on college entrance exams and other variables may be considered. In the middle schools of the state the students are tested in reading and math each year in grades 6-8 and additionally, in writing, science, and social studies in grade 8. Each school in the state receives a report from the Texas Education Agency that shows what percentage of the students passed each one of the tests, and what percentage passed all of the tests that were taken. These scores can then be used to compare the performance of schools within a district.

TAAS scores, along with other factors such as attendance rate and dropout rate, are used to compute a rating for each school. The four ratings used in Texas are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low Performing. For the years of 1996-1999, all middle schools in SAISD were rated Acceptable, with the exception of one school that was rated Low Performing one year. For a school to be rated Acceptable in 1996, at least 35 percent of the students had to pass each subject area test, and this had to be true for each individual group of African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged students. To move to a rating of Recognized, the passing rate had to be 30 percent to 70 percent. By 1999, the respective passing rates were 45 percent and 80 percent. For the year 2000 ratings, the passing rate for Acceptable was raised to 50 percent. The 2000 data showed that two schools were Low Performing (4 and 13), two were Recognized (7 and 17), and the rest were rated Acceptable.

For the purposes of this report, the actual scores on the TAAS tests for the years of 1998, 1999, and 2000 for the SAISD middle schools were used to identify the five lowest-performing schools and the five highest-performing schools.

The highest-performing schools, beginning with the highest performer followed by the other four in descending order, were 17—7—3—6—8. The lowest-performing schools, beginning with the highest of the group followed by the other four in descending order, were 10—5—2—4--13.

Having identified these schools, it was now possible to investigate the relationships between them and the data from the study. The two groups of schools were compared on several data sets: (1) the mean scores for the several categories used in this study to classify survey responses, (2) the kinds of changes the respondents would like to make the work of teachers more effective and pleasant, (3) the kinds of changes that would make the school more effective in serving students, (4) the greatest weaknesses in the schools, and (5) the greatest strengths of the schools. It must be emphasized that what is being compared are the perceptions of the professional staff in the middle schools. How accurately these perceptions reflect the realities of the school is not known.

After the presentation of the survey data as described above, reflections on these data will be presented, followed by a discussion of information gained through the interviews that might relate to the academic performance of the schools. This approach can be followed only for the schools where interviews were conducted.

Comparison of Mean Scores by Categories

Table 13 shows the category scores for the individual schools. The mean scores for each group show that the high-performing schools have a higher score on every category, indicating that the respondents in those schools were more positive in their ratings than those in low-performing schools. For some categories the means for the two groups differed only slightly (community involvement and support, part B; external influences; and TAAS emphasis). For other categories, the differences between the groups were somewhat greater. The greatest difference was in the category of vision and expectations, where the high group mean was 1.20 above that of the low group. This difference suggests that the low-performing schools have not developed a vision and expectations for the school to the extent that the high-performing schools have. Scores for the category of instructional influences indicate that teachers and students in lower-performing schools do not receive the same level of freedom, support, and resources for instruction as do teachers in the higher-performing schools. Perhaps this contributes to the teachers in the lower-performing schools rating teacher attitudes and the school environment for students and teachers somewhat lower than teachers in the higher-performing schools. The differences between the two groups may result from the leadership in the schools. The mean for the high-performing group indicates that the respondents in those schools rate their leadership more positively than do the respondents in the lower-performing schools.

While the mean scores on the categories reveal some clear and definite differences between the high- and low-performing groups, when the scores for individual schools are considered, these findings are called into question. In the high-performing group, School 6, and to some extent School 8, have category scores that are higher than those of the other schools. This is especially true for the category of leadership, where Schools 6 and 8 have category scores that are both positive and markedly higher than the scores for the other three schools. In almost all categories Schools 6 and 8 have scores somewhat higher than those for Schools 7 and 3. In the low-performing group, Schools 2 and 5 stand out as having scores somewhat higher than the other three schools in that group, and for a number of the categories, either School 2 or School 5, or sometimes both of them, have higher scores than do Schools 3 and 7 in the high group. For some categories, Schools 2 and 5 have higher scores than Schools 3, 7, and 17, the three schools with the highest academic standing. Because of these and other overlaps in category scores between the schools in the low- and high-performing groups, no clear and consistent relationship between any of the categories and academic performance of the schools has been established.

Table 13
Mean Category Scores for High and Low Performing Schools

		High Performing Schools						Low Performing Schools					
		17	7	3	6	8	Mean Group	10	5	2	4	3	Mean Group
Leadership		2.82	2.76	2.56	4.02	3.92	3.22	2.76	3.18	2.75	2.56	2.26	2.70
Instructional influences		3.42	2.87	2.96	3.88	3.17	3.26	2.89	3.35	3.09	2.96	2.14	2.31
Teacher roles		3.60	3.63	3.38	3.92	3.87	3.68	3.10	3.78	3.53	3.26	3.23	3.38
Teacher attitudes		3.59	3.23	3.14	4.28	3.93	3.63	3.37	3.57	3.15	2.73	2.24	3.01
Vision/ expectations		3.35	2.86	2.96	4.36	3.94	3.50	2.09	3.32	3.06	2.60	2.50	2.30
Community involvement/ support	A	3.12	2.39	2.99	2.94	2.17	2.72	1.92	2.46	2.40	1.97	1.27	2.00
	B	3.16	3.04	3.18	3.98	3.04	3.28	3.77	3.56	3.15	2.97	2.82	3.25
Organizational arrangements		3.38	3.04	3.19	4.47	3.43	3.50	2.91	2.96	3.65	2.67	3.55	3.15
External influences		2.71	2.33	2.36	2.86	2.70	2.59	2.38	2.85	2.59	2.50	2.45	2.55
School environment for students		3.76	3.31	3.50	4.07	3.51	3.63	3.24	3.31	3.22	2.27	2.73	2.95
School environment for teachers		3.20	2.74	2.91	4.07	3.30	3.24	2.45	3.15	2.38	2.33	2.60	2.46
TAAS		3.93	4.22	3.93	4.29	4.43	4.16	4.29	3.74	4.35	3.54	4.09	4.00

Schools 3 and 17 are multilingual magnet schools, which means they have students from outside their regular school boundaries. These magnet programs are rather demanding academically, and the students who are admitted to them must have the desire and qualifications to participate in the programs. These students make up only a portion of the population at each school, but they may account, in part, for the fact that Schools 3 and 17 are high-performing schools. However, it does not explain why the category scores for School 17 are somewhat higher than those for School 3. School 17 would seem to have a more positive school environment and a greater instructional focus than School 3, but their academic performance does not differ greatly. There are no special programs or features in Schools 7, 6, and 8 that would readily explain their high academic performance. School 6 is generally recognized throughout the district as the school with the best student discipline, and this may account for the high category ratings, but not necessarily the academic standing of the school.

Kinds of Changes Desired for Teachers
Question 4 on the survey asked what kinds of changes might be made in the school to make the work of teachers more pleasant and effective. Shown below are the two changes most frequently mentioned by the respondents in the high- and low-performing schools. Next to the change is shown what percentage of the total responses to question 4 addressed that change. The higher the percentage, the greater the number of responses identifying this as a desired change. The information presented below comes from Table 8.

High-Performing Schools	Low-Performing Schools
17 Improve staff relationships 29% Better administration/leadership 20%	10 Better instruction/instructional support 28 % Less paperwork 18%
7 Better discipline 29% More support for special needs students 14%	5 Better discipline 29% Better instructional support 25%
3 Better discipline 29% Better administration/leadership 13%	2 Better discipline 28% Better administration/leadership 24%
6 Better instructional support 21% More time to plan 14%	13 More professionalism 30% Better administration/leadership 25%
8 Less paperwork 30% Better discipline 14%	4 Better discipline 26% Better administration/leadership 10%

A review of these expressed needs does not reveal any real differences between the two groups of schools. The same issues are addressed in both groups about the same number of times. For example, better discipline is mentioned three times in the high group and three times in the low group. Better administration/leadership is mentioned two times in the high group and three times in the low group.

Kinds of Changes Desired for Students
Question 5 on the survey asked what kinds of changes would be desirable in order to make the school more effective in serving students. The two responses made most frequently are shown below for the two groups of schools, along with the frequency of the responses. This information comes from Table 9.

High-Performing Schools	Low-Performing Schools
17 Better discipline 22% More support for special-needs students 17%	10 Better ways for motivating and supporting students 16% More instruction/instructional support 16%
7 More support for special-needs students 32% Better discipline 19%	5 Better discipline 22% More parent support/involvement 15%
3 Better discipline 20% Smaller classes 15%	2 Smaller classes 12% Better discipline 10%
6 Better instructional support 21% Better management of student behavior 21%	13 Better instructional support 20% Better discipline 20%
8 Better organization and scheduling 26% Better discipline 14%	4 Smaller classes 16% More support for special needs students 21%

While there are a few differences in the needs expressed in the high and low groups, there are no clear or consistent differences that might be related to the academic performance of the schools. In fact, there are as many differences within each group as there are between the groups.

Greatest Weaknesses in the Schools

On the survey, question 8 asked what was the greatest weakness in the school. The information shown below comes from Table 11.

High-Performing Schools	Low-Performing Schools
17 Administration/leadership 36% Discipline 24% and teacher attitudes 24%	10 Lack of parent support 27% Student apathy 23%
7 Discipline 34% Poor administration/leadership 28%	5 Discipline 33% Lack of parent support/involvement 17%
3 Discipline 43% Poor administration/leadership 28%	2 Poor administration/leadership 27% Discipline 22%
6 Lack of communication/collaboration 18% Lack of parental support/involvement 18%	13 Poor administration/leadership 43% Discipline 29%
8 Lack of parental support/involvement 30% Lack of cohesiveness/communication 22%	4 Discipline 29% Poor administration/leadership 28%

Three weaknesses are dominant among these schools: a need for better student discipline, a need for improved administration/leadership, and a need for more parent involvement and support. These weaknesses appear almost an equal number of times in each group, which suggests that they are not related in any particular way to the academic performance of the schools. Interestingly, administration is perceived as a weakness in the three top-performing schools and in the three bottom-performing schools. The same thing is true for discipline, except that a fourth school in the low group also identified discipline as a weakness.

Greatest Strengths in the Schools

In every one of the high- and low-performing schools, teachers were identified as the greatest strength. In some (but not all) schools a second strength was identified. Shown below are the percentages of responses in each school indicating that teachers were the greatest strength, along with the second greatest strength, if one was identified (see Table 10).

High-Performing Schools	Low-Performing Schools
17 Teachers 60% Multilingual program 11%	10 Teachers 82% n/a
7 Teachers 32% Administration/leadership 16%	5 Teachers 54% Administration/leadership 29%
3 Teachers 40% Multilingual program 24%	2 Teachers 45% 90-minute blocks 14%
6 Teachers 29% Administration/leadership 24%	13 Teachers 46% n/a
8 Teachers 29% Teaming/collaboration 17%	4 Teachers 61% n/a

The perception of teachers as the greatest strength in these schools is quite obvious. This perception is stronger in the low group than the high group. When the teacher percentages for the schools in each of the two groups are combined, on the average 58 percent of the respondents in the low group rate teachers as the greatest strength as compared with 38 percent in the high group. The rating of teachers as the greatest strength certainly indicates that they feel good about their value in their schools, but it also suggests that they do not perceive other factors in their school to be of greater strength. This position is supported by the fact that three of the five schools in the low group did not identify a second strength and their average rating for teachers (58 percent) was somewhat higher than that for the high-performing schools (38 percent). In each of the high-performing schools a second strength is identified. It is of interest to note that in Schools 17 and 3, the two multilingual magnet schools, the rating of teachers as greatest strength is somewhat higher than in the other two schools, and the multilingual program is rated as a second strength. These two findings taken together indicate the presence of the magnet program in these schools may be a significant factor in their academic performance.

Reflections on the Survey Data in Relation to Academic Performance of Schools

The most reliable and confident conclusion that can be drawn from the attempts to relate the survey data to the academic performance of the schools is that no relationships explain the differences in the academic performance of schools. The higher-performing schools as a group did reflect a more positive environment and greater attention to factors such as vision and expectations and instructional influences. When the individual schools within the two groups were considered, however, it was found that many of the survey ratings of some of the schools in the low-performing group were higher than those of some schools in the high-performing group. In a number of data comparisons, the differences in survey results were as great or greater within each group than they were between the groups. Thus, the relationships that appeared when the schools were compared as a group were apparently the result of the performance of several schools in each group rather than being a real difference between the high- and low-performing groups.

Responses to the survey question asking about the greatest strength in the school did reveal some differences between the two groups. For the low-performing group as a whole teachers were rated as the greatest strength by a much greater percentage (58 percent) than they were in the high-performing group (38 percent). Also, three of the five schools in the low group did not identify a second strength, while all schools in the high group did. These two findings suggest that the teachers in the low-performing schools perceive they are not only the greatest strength in their school, but the only strength. Even in this data comparison some notable differences are evident within each group.

Interview Information Compared with Academic Performance

Interviews were conducted in three of the high-performing schools, 17, 7, and 6, and two of the low-performing schools, 5 and 2. Reflections from the interviews for these schools are presented below:

School 17. Those interviewed in this school generally feel very good about the school and about its accomplishments academically and in extracurricular activities. They spoke often about the quality of the students, but they were invariably referring to the magnet students and the multilingual program and acknowledged that the presence of the magnet students had a major influence on what the school was like. The faculty seemed to be generally satisfied with the school leadership, but there were reports of favoritism in the way the administration treated some of the teachers. The teachers reported they have much freedom to carry out instruction in their classrooms, and that the principal is supportive of what they do, but they get little or no feedback on how they were performing. Some said that because the school is so large the administrators do not have time to be instructional leaders. This information offers some explanation of why this school has high academic performance, yet the school leadership is rated below 3.00.

School 7. This was a school that projected mixed feelings. Some of the teachers feel that the school leadership is truly outstanding, while others feel somewhat negative about the leadership. Those who feel positive reported that the principal is very approachable and will listen to any concerns and that he allows teachers great freedom in their classrooms. Those who feel negative tend to base their views on the way discipline is handled. These individuals feel that the principal often acts in favor of students and parents over teachers. Even among those who are positive about the leadership, there are concerns about discipline. Another major concern among those interviewed is related to the special education program. They feel that there is inadequate support for the program, that it is not organized as well as it might be, and that inclusion is not working. Some attribute the perceived problems with the special education program to the leadership. These findings help to explain why the survey ratings for this school are relatively low in some areas, but they do not provide an explanation of the high academic performance of the school. Teachers in this school, perhaps even more than the others, claimed that they work very hard and are committed to the success of their students regardless of the obstacles they have to overcome. The teachers reported that the school has a history of being academically successful and every teacher realizes that he or she is expected to maintain that reputation.

School 6. There was an obvious pride in this school among most of those who were interviewed. They not only feel that their school is the best academically, they believe it is the best in extracurricular activities, and they have many to offer students. The interviewees spoke especially about the level of discipline in the school and how the school has a long history of the best discipline of any school in the district. It was rather clear from the interviews that the principal is viewed as the leader of the school and that there are expectations that are known, accepted, and pursued by the staff. These expectations are for high academic performance from the students, good student discipline, and teachers who work diligently to meet those expectations. Some who were interviewed view the school as being quite rigid and not a comfortable place to work, but those teachers are certainly in the minority. The teachers feel they have the support of the school leadership in what they do, but they also are aware of what is expected of them and how much freedom they can exercise. The principal said that one of his responsibilities is to see that everyone "is on the same page." Rather than being seen as oppressive, this leadership role seemed to create unity within the staff. Like all schools in the district, the primary goal of the school was to improve scores on the TAAS. The interviews revealed that the teachers feel completely supported by the administration in the area of discipline and in other areas of their work, so they are pleased to be working in the school. These feelings were reflected in their responses to the survey items. This general contentment among teachers coupled with definite expectations for students and teachers to succeed would seem to account, at least in part, for the academic performance of the school.

Among the low-performing schools, interviews were conducted in schools 5 and 2.

School 5. The principal of this school had just completed his second year as the leader of the school at the time of the interviews. From the interview with him and with the teachers and students, several things were apparent. He is an individual of considerable energy, and he has adopted a mission to change the school from what it was in the past. His new goals include improved school maintenance, improved cafeteria service, better student discipline, and improved academic outcomes. Toward these goals a number of changes had been and were being made, which disturbed some teachers. Most, however, welcomed the changes and their support is reflected in the generally positive responses to the survey. During the time the interviews were being conducted the principal was seen out and about in the school, interacting with students and teachers. Many times he was praising a student for something, and other times he was reprimanding or correcting a student. Regardless of the message he was delivering, it seemed clear that he was a visible and active force in what is happening in this school. The principal emphasizes high standards and expectations for the students, and he wants all teachers to believe that all students can and would be successful learners. At the same time, he claims he still has some teachers who do not teach in their classroom as if they believe this. This may account for the low academic performance of the school. The teachers at this school indicated less emphasis on TAAS specific instruction than did teachers in most other schools. This was supported by the survey, for School 5 had the next to lowest score of all 17 schools on the item asking about emphasis on TAAS instruction.

School 2. Several of the responses to the interview question that asked about expectations for students and teachers suggest what this school is like. One person said expectations are relatively low for students, but teachers are expected to produce high TAAS scores. Another person stated that they do not expect their students to do as well as the students in the other middle schools. Another said the expectations for the students is that they will come to school every day, dressed properly and ready to work independently. While there were expressions of commitment to success for all students, the staff seem to be resigned to the fact that this was not going to happen. Teachers reported that they have some good students in the school, but they also spoke of a lack of appreciation for the value of an education on the part of many parents and students. Teachers apparently are granted a great deal of independence in their instructional practices without interference or oversight from the administrators. Yet, the principal reported that some teachers on the faculty do not provide effective instruction. The only vision expressed for the school was to raise TAAS scores, but no plan for how this is to be done is in place, beyond continuing to work hard at the task.

Another Look at the Schools

A View from the Inside

SAISD is a district in a large American city, servicing a student population that is largely minority and low socioeconomic. It is an urban district, but it does not have the negative characteristics that are often associated with urban districts. Interviews were conducted in six of the 17 SAISD middle schools, and researchers made at least two personal visits to each school for the distribution and collection of the survey instrument. Inside and out, these schools were clean, inviting places to be. The buildings and the grounds were well maintained, no evidence of graffiti or other vandalism. Inside the buildings, the hallways were clean and the walls along the corridors were filled with many colorful bulletin boards and examples of student work. Many of the buildings were quite old and often surrounded by portable classrooms. It would be less than honest to say these campuses were attractive, but in spite of the limitations imposed by age, these schools presented an environment quite conductive to learning.

As the researchers moved about the schools, observing large numbers of students going from class to class, entering and leaving the buildings, the schools appeared to be operating in an orderly manner. By any judgment they seemed to be safe places for students and staff. The students seemed to be typical adolescents who very much enjoyed each other's company and who were mannerly and respectful within their school. As required by the district, all students wore the required uniforms, but they managed to express their individuality with the various sweaters and jackets that they wore with the uniforms. Regardless of how they were attired, the students in all the schools were well-groomed.

In Texas, results on the TAAS test are the primary means for evaluating the success of individual schools and school districts. There can be no doubt that the middle schools in SAISD were very sensitive to this measure, for it was the single greatest driving force behind instruction. These tests are the source of considerable stress on teachers and students as they attempt to "look good" when the results are published in the paper, discussed on the local television stations, and carefully considered by parents and educators alike. At the same time, the TAAS tests tend to simplify the instructional task for teachers, for they know exactly what they must teach to ensure success. "Success" is currently judged primarily by how well the students do on three tests: reading, mathematics, and writing. Reading and mathematics are tested each year in the middle schools, but writing is tested only in grade 8. Science and social studies are also tested in grade 8, but to date the outcomes on these tests have garnered relatively little attention.

A View from the Outside

As a measure of school success, TAAS is quite prescribed and to some extent rather limited in its scope. Thus, it is useful to compare the data from this study with a broader array of measures or indicators of effective schools as found in the professional literature.

One of the pioneers in effective schools research was Ron Edmonds, who identified five "correlates" of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979):

- There is a widely understood and accepted focus on instruction.
- Teachers have high expectations for students to obtain at least minimal mastery.
- Student performance is measured and motivated.
- There is an orderly, safe climate.
- The principal is the instructional leader.

It is interesting to note that Edmonds did not include parental involvement in his correlates. He believed that schools should and could be successful even without parental involvement.

The first three correlates are definitely operative in the SAISD schools. There is a clear and certain focus for instruction—the TAAS. As for expectations, every teacher strives diligently throughout the year to get every student to pass the TAAS tests. In those grades where students are not tested via the TAAS, there is an expectation that the teachers will be preparing the students to pass the TAAS when they next take it. There is no doubt that there exists in the schools a system for measuring and monitoring student performance; it is the TAAS. School districts, schools, teachers, and students are all evaluated by the performance on the TAAS tests. Some would argue that the TAAS is not an adequate measure of school or student success, but the fact remains that in Texas it is the measure of success.

The SAISD schools do not measure up on the last two correlates as well as on the first three. In every school considerable concerns were expressed about student discipline. Those who work in the schools related that they believed the schools to be safe for students and for teachers, but that poor student discipline led to a less than orderly climate for teaching and learning.

In the 1970s, Edmonds proclaimed that for a school to be effective, the principal of the school must be an instructional leader. That same claim is being made today. In a recent article Checkley (2000) reaffirmed this belief when she stated: "The key role of the contemporary principal is to serve as instructional leader who, in turn, promotes teacher growth" (1). The SAISD study did not investigate the issue of instructional leadership in a direct manner, but the study data provided some insights into the issue. In none of the schools did the teachers refer to the principal as an instructional leader or mention ways in which the principal had influenced their classroom instruction. Furthermore, teachers often stated that they were given a great deal of freedom in what they did in their classrooms and that the administrators rarely came into their classroom. As for promoting teacher growth, there was virtually no mention of professional development activities in the schools. It certainly cannot be claimed that the principals were not good instructional leaders, but the information, or lack of information, relative to this issue raises questions about the role of instructional leadership in these middle schools.

According to research conducted by Tarter, Sabo, and Hoy (1995), the common concepts of instructional leadership may not operate in middle schools as they do at other levels. These researchers found that trust in the principal and trust in colleagues work independently to move the organization toward effectiveness, stating: "In middle schools, the exercise of professional judgment rests on the teachers' conviction that they can depend upon on each other and the principal even in difficult situations" (48). In the interviews, many teachers reported that the best thing about their school was the support that teachers provided for each other. While teachers often complained about the lack of administrative support they received, they seemed to welcome the freedom they had in their instructional practices. This freedom reflected a sense that they could depend on the principal not to interfere with their classroom instruction. It may be that in middle schools, strong collegial relations among teachers, coupled with a perception of instructional freedom, substitutes for instructional leadership as it is commonly defined.

Another set of factors useful for analysis of the SAISD schools is found in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989). This document sets forth eight essential principles for transforming middle schools:

1. Creating a community of learners
2. Empowering teachers and administrators
3. Teaching a core of common knowledge
4. Ensuring success for all students
5. Preparing teachers for middle grades
6. Improving academic performance through better health and fitness
7. Engaging families in the education of young adolescents
8. Connecting schools with communities

Creating a Community of Learners

Several of the key impressions devolve from the principle of creating a community for learning. In every school the students had a regular advisory period. Exactly how much individual advising students received during this period was not known. Five of the six schools employed academic teaming; groups of subject-area teachers were formed as a team and assigned a group of students that they all taught. Within these teams of teachers and students the schools did form a type of smaller learning environment, although not exactly like the schools within schools described in *Turning Points*. The sixth school (School 6) did have grade-level and departmental teams, but these teams did not share a common group of students and they did not meet on a regular basis.

Research has been shown that the collaboration of teachers and administrators to form a professional learning community does contribute to school effectiveness (Newman and Wehlage, 1995). At least five of the schools met some of the criteria set forth under the principle of a *Community of Learners, but none of the schools met the criteria for a professional learning* community as described by Hord (1997) in her excellent review of the literature on this topic. In a professional learning community, staff members see themselves as being responsible for the total development of the students and as having a collective responsibility for the success of the students. In the schools examined in this research, teachers individually expressed a commitment to the success of students, but there was no real evidence that they shared a collective responsibility for the students. In the 17 middle schools, it seemed that the collaborative efforts of teachers were limited to their academic teams and did not extend to the school as a whole.

In a professional learning community all staff share in developing a vision for the school, and that vision serves as a guide for the decisions they make about teaching and learning. One of the interview questions had to do with a shared vision for the school, and not once was a true vision articulated. The respondents frequently noted that the school was committed to every student succeeding, or all students reaching their full potential, or, more often, to improving TAAS scores. Occasionally the Campus Improvement Plan was mentioned, but only in passing. No one talked about what goals or aspirations the school had for two, three, or five years in the future. In the schools immediate goals seemed to be the extent of the vision. Even so, very few respondents spoke about how such goals were developed or how they were to be accomplished.

In schools that are characterized as professional learning communities, certain values and norms are shared by all staff members and are instrumental in forming the culture of a school. In only one school, School 6, did there seem to be a set of values and beliefs that were shared across the staff: This school had long been noted for its commitment to an orderly, well-disciplined student body. Everyone in the school, from the principal to the custodians, accepted a responsibility to contribute to and promote these values and norms. This commitment seemed to unify the faculty and to create a belief that their school was the best— a success-oriented culture, if you will. Yet it was not at all clear that any set of shared beliefs and norms influenced classroom instruction, in fact, there seemed to be less teacher collaboration in this school than in any of the others. School 17, the multilingual magnet school, identified itself as the Harvard of Middle Schools. A number of the interviewees mentioned this identification, but it seemed more like a slogan and a reflection of the performance of the students than a shared norm or value. This is not to say the staff in that school did not have a sincere commitment to the students; they did, but it seemed to be on an individual basis rather than as a result of a set of values or norms that had been developed, accepted, and acted on by the faculty as a whole.

Empowering Teachers and Administrators

Closely related to the issue of learning communities is the principle of the empowerment of teachers and administrators. It is not likely that a school will be a professional learning community if the teachers and administrators are not empowered. Empowerment occurs when all staff members have an active voice in any actions taken in the school that are related to teaching and learning. Not only do the staff have a voice, but they accept responsibility for all aspects of the school and schooling that influence teaching and learning.

In the interviews the teachers were asked if they had a voice in what happened in the school. More often than not the answer was in the affirmative; they said that through their teams they had a voice, many mentioned the Instructional Leadership Team as another mechanism they had for input, and many said they had access to the principal whenever they wished. In one way the teacher responses indicated a sense of satisfaction with their voice in school affairs, and in another way there was a sense of resignation: this is the way it is. This latter feeling was supported in part by the survey data, In response to the survey question about their involvement in decision-making, respondents in three of the six schools where interviews were conducted (7, 15, 17) rated the item below 3.00. Out of the 17 schools, nine schools rated the item below 3.00. While the respondents in at least three of the interview schools had positive feelings about their involvement in decision making, in none of the schools was there evidence of real empowerment of teachers.

The lack of teacher empowerment was apparent in several ways. First, the teachers often spoke of how they had a voice, but almost never about how the faculty collectively had a voice. Not once was there mention of a decision that was made as a result of faculty action. No doubt such decisions were made in the schools, but they were not mentioned, suggesting that they were not common. Second, when addressing the issue of decisionmaking, teachers often said that they had a voice, but the final decision was made by the principal. Third, at no time was there mention of committees in the schools with responsibility for advising, guiding, and establishing policies for the organization and actions of the school. Finally, there seemed to be no sense of ownership among the teachers for the problems that existed in the schools. For example, in every school teachers said that they had problems with student discipline and with the lack of involvement and support of parents, but in no school did the teachers mention a plan of action they had developed to address these issues. If there was a problem in the school, it seemed it was one to be solved by someone else; the teachers did not accept responsibility for it nor did they believe that they had the power to make a difference. To some extent this assignment of responsibility extended to the classroom as teachers took the view that their teaching was hindered by students and parents who did not value education and the distractions that discipline problems caused in their classrooms. In a school where teachers are truly empowered, they would accept responsibility for solving the problems that exist.

Teaching a Core of Common Knowledge

There can be no doubt that there is a common core of knowledge that is being taught in the middle schools—that which is tested on the TAAS. But this principle emphasizes that teaching a core of knowledge must include teaching critical thinking, teaching students to be active citizens, and teaching healthy lifestyles, and, finally, integrating subject matter across disciplines. The interview information suggested rather clearly that there was very little interdisciplinary teaching and only limited teaching of critical thinking. One of the concerns expressed in the district office interviews was that the schools were locked into teaching to the TAAS and were not teaching higher-order thinking skills. The study data indicates that this is true. No information collected in the interviews revealed the teaching of healthy lifestyles and or teaching students to be active citizens.

Ensuring Success for All Students

This principle states that schools should be structured so that all students have opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the program. Schools should provide appropriate grouping of students, flexible scheduling, and extended opportunities for learning. Through the use of academic teaming and tutorial programs, the schools were attempting to meet the needs of all students, even though they were not all succeeding to the same degree. Block scheduling seemed to provide more flexibility for time usage than the traditional schedule, but once in place this type of scheduling was not really flexible either. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the schools was the limited number of electives available to students. It could not be said that the students had expanded learning opportunities, with the exception of the magnet students in the multilingual program, who did have a greater choice of classes.

Preparing Teachers for the Middle Grades

At the time of this report, Texas had just put into effect a certification program for middle school teachers. All teachers currently teaching in the middle schools were prepared as either elementary or secondary teachers. The one area where there was a clear need for better teacher preparation was a better understanding of adolescents coupled with appropriate techniques and procedures for schooling students at this age level. Teachers consistently reported that middle school students are very different from elementary and high school students in their personal development, often describing them as having "raging hormones." While the teachers acknowledged the supposed differences in the personal development of middle school students, the behavioral expectations for these students did not seem to be any different than those in elementary and high schools, especially in the punitive approach to discipline. Teachers also frequently mentioned that many students were apathetic and had no motivation to learn, yet neither the interviews or the survey indicated classroom instruction in the middle schools was any different than instruction that might be found in high schools.

Improving Academic Performance Through Better Health and Fitness
No information was collected in this study that addressed this principle.

Engaging Families in the Education of Young Adolescents
In every school staff complained that they lacked adequate parent involvement and support. The staff in the schools seemed to feel they were making a good effort to get this to happen, but it was not happening. In a couple of schools respondents was mentioned that they had evening activities, such as math and science nights or computer nights, when parents and their students were encouraged to come to the school. Beyond this there was no mention of any planned, consistent efforts to gain greater parent involvement and support. It seemed to be something everyone wanted, but no one person or group took the responsibility for making it happen. In each school an individual was assigned the title of Community Liaison, but exactly what responsibilities these individuals had was not explored. It seemed that much of the responsibility for developing community relations was assigned to this person.

Connecting schools with communities
This principle calls for middle schools to provide opportunities for youth service, to have access to health and social services, to expand career guidance for students, and to augment resources for teachers and students. In only one school was there mention of opportunities for service activities outside the school. No attempt was made in this study to collect information on available health and social services or career guidance. In their interviews, the district office personnel indicated that in the past few years much attention has been given to the middle schools, including providing additional resources. At the same time the respondents conceded that more resources were needed. For the most part these resources were directed to the teachers, not the students. Many teachers expressed a desire for more resources to offer more field trips to students and to engage them in off-campus learning activities.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

Based on the outcomes from this study it must be concluded that middle schools, or at least those in SAISD, are complex organizations that are difficult to define and categorize. The findings provide detailed and useful information about the individual schools, but the purpose was to classify or group them in relation to academic performance. Based on TAAS scores for the past three years, five schools were identified as high-performing academically and five as low-performing. No consistent relationships emerged between the academic performance of these two groups of schools and the way they were judged by the respondents. For example, two schools with the lowest academic performance were rated quite low on all the variables investigated in this study, but two other schools in the low-performing group were rated by their staffs more positively on a number of variables than were two of the schools in the high-performing group. In the group of high-performing schools, the top three academic performers were rated less positively by the respondents than were the other two schools in the high group whose academic performance was not as high.

In the six schools where interviews were conducted, the additional information gained was helpful in explaining the specific factors that had contributed to the level of academic performance. However, even this additional information did not lead to a determination of consistent factors across the schools. The three high-performing schools where interviews were conducted exhibited what might be called a culture of success. Each school had a history of high student achievement, and this history seemed to drive the efforts of the staff to continue the pattern of success. This culture was developed and maintained differently in each school. In the two low-performing schools where interviews were conducted no culture of success was evident. The sixth school where interviews were conducted was neither a high-performing school nor a lowperformer. It was in the middle group. This school seemed to be developing a success culture, but it has not yet happened and major problems with student discipline are making progress difficult.

Why did this study fail to find any clear and certain factors that explain why some schools had greater academic success than other schools? One possibility is that no factor or set of factors existed that would explain the differences. Second, it is possible that such factors did exist but the study did not seek the right information in the right manner to reveal them. Third, the opinions that constituted the data set may not have accurately portrayed the situation in the schools. For example, the leadership provided by the principal may have been more or less effective in promoting academic success than the respondents judged it to be. Finally, the use of TAAS scores to measure the success of schools may have been too limiting, possibly obscuring other more appropriate means for determining successful schools in SAISD. In a critical analysis of the TAAS-driven system in Texas, McNeil (2000) states that the system discriminates against minority students and masks persistent inequalities in the education minorities receive. She maintains: "What such youngsters are taught, how they are taught, how their learning is assessed and represented in school records, what is omitted from their education—all these factors are hidden in the system of testing and in the accounting system that reports its results" (p. 731). A recent study by Haney (2000) supports the claim that TAAS does have a differential impact on minority students.

Implications

Although this study did not identify any factors that clearly and consistently related to the academic performance of the schools, it did develop findings that can be useful in designing efforts to improve all of the 17 middle schools. These findings and their implications are presented below.

One finding that was consistent across the schools has implications for how all the other findings are addressed. Teachers in every school rated themselves as the greatest strength in the school. In the interviews and in the comments on the surveys, they indicated that they work very hard and are committed to the success of their students. Often they mentioned that they do this in spite of impediments such as lack of appreciation and support from the school administrators. Because the teachers feel they are already giving a full measure and more to their work, it is likely that any improvement efforts that require more of the teachers will be met with resistance unless they can see a clear benefit to themselves.

Closely related is the finding that the teachers do not seem to accept responsibility for some of the problems that exist within their schools, such as poor student discipline and student apathy. At the same time they are prone to assert that the existence of these problems interferes with their effectiveness and with the academic progress of their students. This finding has two implications. First, it is likely that the problems teachers perceive to be impediments to their effectiveness will be the things they would most want to deal with in any improvement efforts, but they will view those as problems to be resolved by someone else, not by them. This leads to the second implication: There is a need in the schools for the development of the concept of a community of learners in which the school staffs accept responsibility for all aspects of the school that influence teaching and learning. In most schools the teachers do collaborate in teams, but this collaboration is limited to the work of the teams and does not extend to the school as a whole.

Several issues were frequently identified across the schools as matters of concern to the staff in the schools. Prominent among these were poor student discipline, lack of parental involvement and support, and problems related to serving those students with special needs (usually meaning special education programs). These issues not only make life in the schools less pleasant for teachers, but they also seem to interfere with the education of the students. It is essential that the schools be provided with the guidance and assistance necessary to address these issues in a manner that will provide long-term solutions. The solutions will not be easy or immediate, but the process should be initiated as soon as possible.

In a number of schools the teachers perceived that the school administrators provided poor or inadequate leadership. The quality of leadership in each of the schools must be a priority concern for the district office officials, who have the responsibility for assigning school leaders. As a part of this responsibility, there is a need for in-depth information relative to the perceptions of teachers about the leadership in the schools: What is lacking in the leadership? What kinds of changes are desired and for what purpose? Can the current leaders make the necessary changes in their behavior or must there be a change in personnel?

There are several issues surrounding the TAAS that should be considered. Given the current emphasis on the TAAS within the state, it is recognized that it is a priority concern in the schools and will surely continue to be so, but the negative impact of this emphasis must be recognized and addressed. On the one hand, teachers complain that students do not see the value of an education and that they are apathetic about school. On the other hand, the extreme emphasis on TAAS preparation limits the opportunities that the students have to engage in learning activities that would increase their interest in school. They also have limited opportunities to participate in activities that would develop critical thinking skills. The vision that the schools have for the future seems to be limited to improving TAAS scores. Schools must find a way to meet the demands for continuing improvement of TAAS scores while also providing educational experiences that interest and motivate students and challenge their full learning potential.

On the measure of how well the school served the needs of teachers, only one school ranked above 4.00 on the five-point scale, and nine schools ranked below 3.00. At a time when there is an increasing shortage of qualified teachers, especially in urban districts, it is extremely important that every effort be made to make the schools a more desirable place in which to work. Addressing the issues described above will surely help to accomplish this, but there must be more communication within the schools and between the schools and the district office to understand what is needed and how it might be provided.

On the survey question that asked how well the actions of the district office had served the needs of the school, only one school rated that item above 3.00. It is apparent that the schools have a rather negative view of the services of the district office. There must be a dedicated effort on the part of personnel in the district office to reverse this attitude, for it will be very difficult for them to be of assistance to the schools unless a bond of trust can be established. A good beginning point for developing this trust would be for the district office personnel to be visible and present in the schools and to be good listeners to what the staff have to say. In one school where one of the researchers had visited several times over the past two years, the teachers stated they had had more contact with the researcher than with anyone from the district office.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

What is life like for teachers and students in this school?

If you were talking to someone about your school who does not know your school, say a parent or another educator, what you tell them?

If you could change two things in your school to improve it, what would they be?

Tell me something about how you see the influence of your school administrators, especially the principal, on what this school is like for teachers and students.

(For principals this question was modified to ask "How do you see your influence on what this school is like for teachers and students?")

Do you feel there is a common vision for where this school is going that is shared by teachers and administrators?

Are expectations for teachers and students clear and well known? If yes, ask: Are these commonly and/or regularly acknowledged and accepted and followed?

To what extent is the voice of teachers acknowledged and respected?

To what extent do students have a voice in what happens in this school?

Would you say this is a school where teachers enjoy working? Why?

Do students here like to come to school here? Why?

When you think of other middle schools in this district how do you think your school compares with them? Why do you say this?

If you had to select one factor that has the greatest influence on what this school is like, what would it be? Is this influence positive or negative?

In what ways do teachers in this school collaborate with each other?

We are interested in how new programs are managed in schools. How are changes in this school introduced and supported?

Are there factors outside your school, such as state mandates, district policies, parental involvement, that have an influence on what kind of school this is? Explain.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR DISTRICT OFFICE PERSONNEL REGARDING SAISD MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Would you begin by giving me your perceptions of the quality, however you might define it, of the SAISD middle schools as a group?

What are the factors that most influence or affect what the middle schools are like?

Now I would like to move to a discussion of specific schools. Thinking of the 17 middle schools as they are today, which ones would you rate as the best in the district, the ones most in need of improvement, and, perhaps, those that fall into a middle group.

When you consider the top schools, what would you say are the key factors that contribute to the quality of the school?

When you consider the schools you ranked as having lower quality, what would you say are the key factors that influence what those schools are like?

When you think of the next 1-3 years, do you feel these rankings of the schools as you have given them is likely to remain much the same, or is there something that might change the rankings? Explain.

To what extent do you think the middle schools are influenced by the district office? By this I mean such things as assistance and support they receive, expectations for them, oversight they are given, district decisions and regulations, etc.

What do you think is most needed to make the middle schools, all of them, even better than they are?

What else could you tell me that will help us to better understand SAISD middle schools?

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Do you like coming to school here? Why?

Is this a good school? Why?

If someone were to ask you what this school is like, what would you tell them?

What is the best thing about this school?

What is the worst thing about this school?

Do you think students in this school often get in trouble?

To make this a better school for you, what changes do you think could or should be made in the school?

Who do you think is most responsible for what this school is like?

In this school are students respected by teachers and administrators?

Are students given an opportunity to say what they would like to have happen in the school?

Is what teachers expect of students too hard or too easy or just about right?

If students are having trouble with their schoolwork, can they easily get extra help from teachers?

Do your teachers spend much time in class preparing you to take the TAAS test?

Do you think parents have much influence on what happens in this school? Explain.

Do you have a lot of extracurricular activities such as clubs, band, and sports that you can participate in? Do many students participate in these types of activities?